

**Intertextuality, Manipulation and Propaganda:
Reworking the Arthurian Legend in
Contemporary Spanish Literature**

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Summary

Whereas the historicity of King Arthur has roundly been contested in academic circles, as Higham (2002) says, the *idea* of a fifth or sixth-century British king called Arthur and the Golden Age of peace and prosperity that accompanied his reign has endured in Western culture for over a thousand years. When studying any Arthurian text, medieval or modern, it is essential to try and understand the nature and purpose of that text as well as the political and cultural context at the time of textual production and consumption. This is because as the Arthurian story has been transformed and adapted by authors it has consistently been used as an agent of political and cultural propaganda to deliver a particular message that is relevant for the contemporary age in which the reworked text is written. In this way, the new text is given a fresh emphasis, ideological purpose and the power to persuade or manipulate contemporary readers to change the present. This thesis examines this manipulative potential of the legend in two contemporary Spanish novels *El rapto del Santo Grial* (1984) by Paloma Díaz-Mas and *Artorius* (2006) by César Vidal. The thesis contends that the intentional, creative and strategic use of intertextuality by these authors, characterised by parody, irony and allegory, acts to manipulate the reader into a desired reading of their texts, thus allowing them a platform to deliver their ideological views and personal concerns about contemporary Spanish society at the times the novels were written.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

‘You can keep an old tradition going only by renewing it in terms of current circumstances’.

-Joseph Campbell, *The Power of Myth* (1991, 26)

The Arthurian scholar Alan Lupack has stated that one reason that the Arthurian legend has remained in the popular imagination for so long lies in the nature of the Arthurian matter itself. The legend does not solely revolve around Arthur, the king and military leader, but incorporates a vast array of complex narratives and a wide cast of characters, all of which are perfect material for adaptation ‘to the values and concerns of the ages or audiences for which they are reinterpreted’ (Lupack 2007, 1). One of the aims of this thesis is to address the question of whether, in contemporary literature, the Arthurian legend is still relevant for an understanding of the social and cultural issues that affect modern society. The thesis seeks to demonstrate how the legend’s motifs, characters and storylines can be transformed and adapted in response to shifting social conditions and pressures in a given culture and can be employed as a framework with which to ‘criticize contemporary affairs under the cover of a narration of the past’ (Sanz Mingo 2009, 101). This act of transformation is also able to bring about change, in that it can be used to promote the opinions and interests of widely divergent groups, thus making it a topic of great interest and worthy of examining. The particular focus of this thesis is the investigation of the innovative ways in which the legend has been reworked by two popular contemporary Spanish authors, Paloma Díaz-Mas in *El rapto del Santo Grial o el Caballero de la Verde Oliva*¹ first published in 1984 and *Artorius* by César Vidal first published in 2006,² two novels that to the best of my knowledge have never been translated for the English speaking market. The key elements the thesis wishes to examine are the rhetorical literary techniques and devices that the above authors use to deliver their personal concerns about Spanish society and their observations on the human condition. To do this, the study seeks to identify the **intertextual** references in both novels and asks how such intertextuality is used as a strategy to

¹ *The Theft of the Holy Grail Or The Knight of the Green Olive*. From this point *El rapto del Santo Grial* will be referred to as *ERDSG*.

² All translations are my own unless otherwise stated.

manipulate a particular reader response. In the case of *ERDSG* the intentional placement of allusions to intertexts, many of which are rooted firmly in the Spanish literary tradition of the romance ballad and Spanish poetry, manipulate a desired reading of the text as a critique of an Arthurian chivalric society, which is warlike, patriarchal, and biased against women: a critique that is equally valuable as an indictment of modern society. In *Artorius*, the question is asked as to whether César Vidal's authorial message is so strongly persuasive and biased that it crosses the threshold from being a **manipulatory** text to a work of **propaganda**. Its intertextuality, in the form of allusions to, and citations of, the works of Virgil and the Bible, along with its adaptation of Arthurian characters, storylines and motifs, is used allegorically to express Vidal's concerns about political change and the erosion of Christian faith and family and moral values in 21st century Spain. The importance of the paratextual elements of both texts is singled out for investigation as an area where the authors are also able to shape readers' opinions and perceptions and influence the reading of their work. A further investigative thread to this thesis examines the role that intertexts play in the representation of gender, discourse and the 'body'³ in each of the novels and the contrasting messages articulated by the authors. The thesis contends that the intentional, creative and strategic use of intertextual references within the texts confirms the importance of the role of the author as well as the reader in the conferring of meaning on the text.

There has always been an interest in the Arthurian story in the Iberian Peninsula. In the Middle Ages Arthurian themes and motifs appeared in several medieval romances written in Castilian Spanish, such as 'Ferido está don Tristán',⁴ 'Lanzarote y el ciervo blanco'⁵ and 'Lanzarote y el caballero orgulloso'.⁶ In addition, great success was enjoyed by the pseudo-Arthurian masterpiece *Amadís de Gaula*,⁷ of which only a 15th century rewritten version by Garci Rodríguez de Montalvo exists (Gracia, cited in Hook (ed.) 2015, 25). In 1605 Cervantes published the first part of his chivalric novel

3 Where the 'body' is presented as a verbal construct or textual identity it is written in inverted commas. References to the physical body are not.

4 'Sir Tristan is wounded'.

5 'Lancelot and the white stag'.

6 'Lancelot and the proud knight'.

7 *Amadis of Gaul*.

Don Quijote, with the second part appearing in 1615. Often labelled as the so-called curse of chivalric fiction, the novel vehemently lampooned the chivalric genre. After 1605 no new chivalresque romance was printed in Spain and comparatively few of those already existing were reissued in their original form, although chapbook reprints of *Amadís* remained popular. By the beginning of the 17th century 'the chivalresque romances had ceased to be live literature in Spain' (Thomas 2013, 179). However, this decline in interest was not solely a Spanish phenomenon but was occurring in the rest of Europe. After the success of Sir Thomas Malory's *Le Morte D'Arthur* (1485) Arthurian tales began to fall out of favour as the classical works of the Greek and Latin writers such as Plato, Homer and Virgil became more widely available again as a result of the growth of the printing press. It was not until the late 19th century and the publication in England of the *Idylls of the King* (1859-1885) by Alfred, Lord Tennyson (1809-1892), often referred to as the Father of the Arthurian Renaissance, that interest was revived in the legend. This coincided with the revival of the Romantic Movement during the latter part of the British Industrial Revolution. This circumstance was also important in the rekindling of the enthusiasm for Arthurian literature in Spain due to the Spanish Romantic poet José Zorrilla's (1817-1893) acceptance of the challenge of translating the *Idylls* into Castilian. The result of this endeavour was, however, not the intended translation but the creation of a new Arthurian artistic output in the form of his book *Ecos de las montañas*,⁸ the third section of which, the long poem entitled 'Los encantos de Merlín' (1868),⁹ revived the interest for Arthurian literature in Spain. Zorrilla made the subject matter very much his own with the character of Vivien becoming a Spanish noble lady and renamed Bibiana. This represented 'the definite comeback of Arthurian subject matter to the literature of Spain after a very long absence' (Zarandona Fernández 2004, cited in Hook (ed.) 2015, 410). Following on from Zorrilla's contribution, Tennyson's work mainly became known in Spain thanks to the prose translations of Vicente de Arana (1848-1890), a Basque industrialist who, in 1883, published *Poemas de Alfredo Tennyson. Enoch Arden; Gareth y Linette; Merlín y Bibiana; La Reina Ginebra; Dora; La Maya*. He translated three of the *Idylls*, 'Gareth y Linette', Merlín y Bibiana' and 'La reina Ginebra' to which he added creative elements of his own. The extent of the

⁸ *Echoes of the Mountains*.

⁹ 'Merlin's Charms'.

contemporary Arthurian comeback in Iberia is evidenced in an extensive list of works in Portuguese, Spanish, Catalan (including Valencian), Galician, Basque and Asturian that Zarandona Fernández has compiled and now published in *The Arthur of the Iberians: The Arthurian Legends in the Spanish and Portuguese Worlds* (Hook (ed.) 2015). Many of the works are by well-known and respected Iberian authors, such as Soledad Puértolas (*La rosa de plata* 1999), the cycle of Arthurian stories for children by the Argentinian author Graciela Montes (2001), Manuel Vázquez Montalbán (*Erec y Enide* 2002), the series of Arthurian short stories by the Basque author Joseba Sarrionandia (2002) and Ana Alonso and Javier Pelegrín's quartet of Arthurian stories (*Excalibur, Camelot* (2016) and *Grial and Avalon* (2017), just to name but a few. However, it is notable that, despite the continuing popularity of Arthurian literature in Spain, the contribution of contemporary Spanish writers to the Arthurian field has been identified as an area overlooked by academia. This has been highlighted by Zarandona Fernández who points out that the absence of Spanish entries to the modern section of the *New Arthurian Encyclopedia* (Lacy 1996) 'gives the misleading impression that the legend has not enjoyed continuity or revival whatsoever' (Zarandona Fernández 2015, 408).

The medieval scholar Stephen Knight (2002, Introduction) has stated that any analysis of an Arthurian text must look to its historical function and ask what the text was written for and what role it fulfilled in that period. Contemporary Arthurian rewritings are no exception. Historically, Arthurian literature has always been shaped by its political and cultural contexts. For example, Geoffrey of Monmouth's document *Historia Regum Britanniae* (c.1139)¹⁰ was written at a time when the Norman nobility was facing strong military resistance from the Welsh. It was produced with the highly political motive of flattering the Norman invaders (his patrons) and to legitimize their conquest of Britain by painting them as saviours of a country that had been impoverished under Saxon rule. Chrétien de Troyes's Arthurian romances (c.1160-1190) were also written to flatter his noble patrons, their lineage and the values that were important to them, such as chivalry, courtesy, courtliness and courtly love. He aimed to depict them as the progressive class in society, in contrast to the monarchy, which appeared isolated from society and its problems. Similarly,

¹⁰ *The History of the Kings of Britain*. This will be henceforth abbreviated to the *Historia*.

Tennyson's cycle of twelve narrative poems, the *Idylls*, which came much later in the Arthurian tradition, was composed in response to the social, ideological and political upheavals of late 19th century Britain and the changing religious, political and sexual mores of Britain's Victorian, middle class, conservative society. Thus, an important factor to be taken into account before embarking on the research for this thesis has been to ascertain the cultural and political situation in Spain at the time *ERDSG* and *Artorius* were published. It will be helpful for the reader of this thesis to become familiar with this also and this will be addressed in the following section.

ERDSG is Paloma Díaz-Mas's first novel and takes its inspiration from the 12th century romance *Le Conte du Graal* (c.1180)¹¹ by the French author Chrétien de Troyes. *ERDSG* emerged during a literary period in Spain called the 'nueva narrativa española'.¹² This chapter in Spanish literary production, which flourished in the 1980s, was characterised by a return to story-telling and fables, the renewed popularity of the historical novel, and an interest in the genres of the feminist novel and the thriller (Macklin 2010, 172-3). It is not so much a retelling or modernization of the medieval work but a historical fiction, a contemporary work that returns to Arthurian times. The Arthurian motifs are easily recognizable in the story and the feel of the medieval tale is perfectly captured but Díaz-Mas's imaginative new treatment and incorporation of many Spanish ballads and popular traditions of Spain provide a uniquely Spanish flavour, which gives the short novel its outstanding originality. Even the subtitle of the novel, *El Caballero de la Verde Oliva*, links the protagonist to the culture of the Mediterranean, with the cultivation of olives having deep roots in the history of Spain from Roman times. *ERDSG* was a finalist in the prestigious Spanish *Herralde* book prize. The short parody relates in a humorous and ironic fashion the story of the quest for the Holy Grail, which was the last of Chrétien's medieval romances but left unfinished, possibly because he died before he could complete it. The novel was published nine years after the death of General Franco and only seven years after the end of government censorship in Spain. Under Franco's patriarchal and culturally and politically repressive regime, women's rights and freedoms were severely restricted in all spheres. Following his death, Spanish women's literature

¹¹ *The Story of The Grail*.

¹² The New Spanish Narrative.

began to adopt a defiant stance against male-dominated literature and society. Female authors revealed a common impulse in wanting to find a new way of writing that was more audacious and authoritative than what had been previously possible under censorship, a way of writing that challenged a history of literature authorised by men. Tentative and faltering at first, by the mid-1980s, this 'gathering chorus' (Ordóñez, 1991, 28) of female voices became a bold crescendo. Paloma Díaz-Mas, along with others such as Riera, Gómez Ojea, Ortiz and García Morales, can count herself amongst this group of Spanish female authors who looked to recuperate the feminine voice in literature. This literary impulse also coincided with the emergence of the use of postmodern terminologies and theories by Spanish scholars (Pérez 2001), which had come to Spain late as a result of four decades of isolation and dictatorship. These core aspects of literary postmodernism manifested themselves in irony, parody and intertextuality, and indeterminacy, meaning a distrust of master narratives and universal claims for truth. Postmodern theories also exhibited scepticism about the transparency of language and the validity of literary and historical knowledge. Zomeño (2002, 427) and Knights (2001, 38) highlight a trend for female writers at this time to direct their attention towards metaliterature and philosophical reflection and to explore issues related to women's reality in a different way from which women's social issues were expressed in literature during the 1970s. As Knights goes on to say: 'a shift can be traced from an experiential literature engaged with feminist issues to a more experimental literature which attempts to break free of the constraints surrounding the construction of women's identity' (Knights 2001, 38). This shift often involved the subversive use of humour generated through intertextuality in the form of parody, irony and caricature (all core aspects of literary postmodernism) to deconstruct patriarchal discourse and values whilst simultaneously asserting an alternative maternal, feminine dialogue to subvert and challenge the logic of traditional patriarchal discourse. Paloma Díaz-Mas's parodic tale of *Le Conte du Graal* is imbued with all the characteristics described above and makes us laugh at the folly of our own contemporary culture's values, but at the same time, there is a darker side to her narrative. As Ordóñez eloquently points out: 'The narrative's medieval setting soon claims the qualities of a metaphor for modernity' and 'interrogates through irony the more generalized patriarchal discourse of blood

and violence that has, for centuries, underwritten textual and cultural legitimacy in the West' (Ordóñez 1991, 152).

Artorius (2006) falls into the genre of the historical novel although it may also be read as an allegory of Spanish society during the first term of the former Prime Minister José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero. It is a novel that has been produced for entertainment and mass readership, a 'novela de usar y tirar'¹³ and written by an author who is possibly more interested in fame and his particular religious and political agenda than writing. The novel has attracted virtually no academic attention. Narrated by the principal character, Merlin, it claims to have found a possible historical identity for the legendary Arthur. Historical fiction has been a booming genre in the Spanish publishing world for a number of years. Luis García Jambrina noted in 2010 that, according to a survey, 22% of Spanish readers declared the historical novel to be their preferred genre (García Jambrina cited in Garrido Ardila 2015, 51). Santos Sanz Villanueva has described the presence of historical novels in the Spanish publishing marketplace as 'a phenomenon that is both striking and bordering on the oppressive' (Sanz Villanueva 2000, cited in Gilmour 2016, 2). The historical novel is now treated and marketed by most publishers as a commodity manufactured to achieve high sales figures and the genre is often characterised by works of varying quality, with the status of novelists often measured by the number of books they write and sell and how loudly they voice their political views (Garrido Ardila 2015, 51). César Vidal emerges as a controversial figure in this contemporary Spanish publishing and media scene. He is a highly prolific writer of both non-fiction and historical novels for which he has won a number of prizes: some years he seems to have produced eight or nine books of different types, raising the suspicion that he has employed the assistance of ghost-writers (Gilmour 2016, 5). He is a man renowned for his outspokenness and for holding ultra-conservative Christian views. *Artorius* was first published in 2006, in the post-environment of the terrorist 'Twin Towers' attack in the United States and the Madrid train bombings, both atrocities perpetrated by Al-Qaeda. Its publication also coincided with a period of social change in Spanish society as a result of the wide range of social reforms that occurred during Spanish Prime Minister José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero's first term of office (2004-8). Many of these were reforms

¹³ Throw away novels.

designed to modernise Spain in the 21st century and did not meet the approval of the Catholic Church nor those of other denominations with ultra-conservative Christian tendencies such as Vidal. Prior to the publication of *Artorius* a number of Vidal's historical novels (*Yo, Isabel la Católica* 2002,¹⁴ *El médico de Sefarad* 2004,¹⁵ and its continuation, *El médico del sultán* 2005)¹⁶ dealt with the era often referred to as the *España de las tres culturas* (711-1492).¹⁷ This was a period of Spain's history in which three religious and cultural communities, Christian, Jewish and Muslim, were present in the Iberian Peninsula and supposedly lived in relative tolerance and harmony in a kind of 'interfaith utopia' (Soifer 2009, 31) or *convivencia*.¹⁸ This era is a popular topic amongst Spanish historical novelists in general: for example, the period forms the backdrop for Ildefonso Falcones's 2006 international best-seller *La catedral del mar*.¹⁹ The concept of *convivencia* was popularised in 1948 by Américo Castro in his book *España en su historia. Cristianos, moros y judíos*²⁰ but has since been challenged by scholars such as Soifer (2009) who have asserted that this romantic picture of interfaith harmony is erroneous. They prefer to speak of a *coexistencia*²¹ rather than a *convivencia*, defining it as a physical coexistence of the three communities in the same cities and neighbourhoods, which did not necessarily lead to their social integration. Nirenberg's research (cited in Soifer 2009, 22) states that outbursts of inter-communal violence were a normal and expected part of coexistence amongst the groups and that this violence also played a vital social function in delineating the place of the non-Christian minorities within the majority society. However, those aforementioned historical novels by Vidal that are set in that period, consistently and perhaps accurately, challenge the idea of *convivencia* by presenting situations of conflict rather than tolerance between the three religions of the Iberian Peninsula, which gives these texts a wholly islamophobic quality. Vidal's islamophobia has been well documented, not only in his representation of Muslims in his books (Gilmour, 2016, Bravo López, 2009) but also in interviews and magazine articles (Pita, 2005).

14 *I, Isabella the Catholic*.

15 *The Doctor from Sefarad*.

16 *The Sultan's Doctor*.

17 *Spain of the Three Cultures*.

18 Living together.

19 *The Cathedral of the Sea*.

20 *Spain in Her History. Christians, Moors and Jews*.

21 Co-existence.

The picture that has emerged of Vidal's character in the course of research for this thesis is that of a man who holds deeply-felt fears of an increasingly multicultural Spain (in particular the influence of Islam), which would leave the country and its Christian values, exposed to attack.

César Vidal and Paloma Díaz-Mas have very different motives for using the Arthurian legend to revisit the medieval past. For Díaz-Mas it is not a question of nostalgia but a critical revisiting which questions the values of chivalric society through parody, irony and humour. In sharp contrast, César Vidal looks back with longing and nostalgia to the medieval Arthurian past and, indeed, even further, to the glorious Roman Empire, as symbolic of a Golden Age, as sites of a lost Utopia to which the modern must return to ensure its future. Although both novels may be enjoyed with only a surface level comprehension of the text this thesis contends that each author's use of intentional intertextuality encourages a double reading (or more) of the narratives and it is at the intertextual level that the authors then have a platform to critique and comment on the issues that concern them in society. In the case of *ERDSG*, the reader is encouraged to relate medieval times to the present and consider how little things have changed in contemporary society with regard to issues such as gender equality. The reader is invited to consider the folly of the romanticization of war, which is illustrated in *ERDSG* by Arthur's displeasure at the possibility of finding the Holy Grail, as this would bring eternal peace to mankind and put an end to all wars. This invokes a comparison with the continued use of violence in contemporary society where every country absurdly tries to outdo one another in the arms race. With regard to the medieval Holy Grail itself, Díaz-Mas draws parallels with the elusive metaphorical grails that man continues to create: for example, the pursuit of happiness, wealth, truth or bodily perfection, most often, ironically, out of reach. Allegory is another form of intertextuality as it is a symbolic representation that can be interpreted to reveal a meaning, which is usually moral or political, on another level of understanding. An allegorical reading of *Artorius* reveals how César Vidal's choice of intertexts are used to express his particular concerns about political change in the present, the threat to Christianity, and what he sees as declining family and moral values in contemporary Spain. The reader's ability to identify and appreciate

the intertexts is vital to the success of the interpretive process as they move back and forth between the intertextual levels of imitation and difference.

The next section of this introduction will outline a summary of what the reader will find in the following chapters of this thesis. Chapter 2 will provide a review of the key theoretical literature consulted for this research and recap the questions that this thesis has set out to answer.

Following on from this, in Chapter 3, the textual analysis of *ERDSG* will commence. Here the emphasis is on the use of irony in the paratextual elements of the novel, namely, the impact of the visual irony represented in the illustration that adorns the novel's front cover and in the possible ironic interpretation of the title and subtitle of the book. The chapter will introduce Linda Hutcheon's theoretical framework on parody and irony that is used for the literary analysis, in particular, the key concepts of 'irony's edge' and 'discursive communities', which are essential for the identification of irony.

Chapter 4 will focus on the literary techniques used by Paloma Díaz-Mas to critique and lampoon Arthurian chivalric society at the textual level. Once again, using the scholarship of Linda Hutcheon, it will extend the discussion of the use of internal and intertextual irony in the novel with special attention paid to the functioning of irony at the level of discourse. It will identify and examine in detail the intertexts introduced by Paloma Díaz-Mas, many of which are prosifications of Spanish romances that she deliberately introduces as a didactic means of improving the reception and understanding of the textual message. The chapter will also concern itself with the classification of the novel as a work of historiographic metafiction.

Chapter 5 will conclude the textual analysis of *ERDSG*. The focus of this chapter will be the use of the 'body' as a 'weapon' to fight back against the laws and restrictions of a historically patriarchal society. The chapter will open with a brief introduction to the ideas surrounding traditional Western philosophical thought based on the mind/body dualism that has ensured the historical inferior status of women. This will be followed by an overview of the contribution of feminists and especially the

concept of *écriture féminine*,²² which has helped to develop new modes of expressivity using existing language to free women's discourse from the restrictive terms of the symbolic order, a term used by the psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan to describe the world of linguistic communication into which we must all enter as children in order to be able to acquire language and deal with others. A number of textual examples will be highlighted as exemplars of this 'feminine' language. The final section of the chapter will end with a discussion of woman as 'joker' and an examination of how the mechanism of joking works at the semantic level. Susan Purdie's theoretical scholarship as expounded in *Comedy. The Mastery of Discourse* (1993) will be used to explain how the transgression of the rule of language involves a pleasurable reversal of control and power for the 'joker' and is a powerful weapon in the challenge to patriarchal discourse.

The literary analysis of *Artorius* will commence in Chapter 6. This chapter will evaluate the accuracy of César Vidal's depiction of the Arthurian Age and assess the claims that he makes in the paratextual elements of the novel, especially in his author's notes, that he has discovered the identity of the true Arthur. The medieval literary sources that Vidal uses as a basis for his claims will be listed and the chapter will evaluate them in the light of contemporary historical scholarship, coming to the conclusion that César Vidal manipulates his sources in order to present his reader with a version of the Arthurian story that gives him a platform to channel his own political and religious ideas.

Chapter 7 will introduce the hypothesis that *Artorius* is an allegory of Spanish society at the time the novel was written. The chapter will provide an overview of the political and social context in Spain and the changes that were implemented in Prime Minister José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero's first term of government in 2004-2008. A flavour of César Vidal's reaction to these new policies is built up from his opinions expressed in interviews and articles of the time and especially with the aid of a series of conversations between Vidal and his erstwhile radio colleague, Federico Jiménez

22 This translates to English as 'Feminine writing'. The essential idea is that in order to communicate new insights into their own experience women must invent a new language by writing from the 'body' to facilitate their escape from male-imposed silence.

Losantos, in *La libertad tiene un precio*²³ (2012). It will be suggested in this chapter that *Artorius* is a work of religious and political propaganda written to influence readers' value systems so that they identify more closely with Vidal's own. The literary techniques used to achieve this are similar to those used in the *roman à thèse* as described by Susan Suleiman (1983), namely, the *exemplum*, semantic redundancy, the amalgam and the continued presence of the authoritative narrator. These are all employed to consistently make a point or express an opinion in the text. The chapter will draw on many examples from the text that highlight these techniques.

The textual analysis of *Artorius* will conclude with Chapter 8. In contrast to the representation of the 'body' in *ERDSG* in Chapter 5 of this thesis, where the idea of the 'body' as a terrain on which power can not only be exercised but also resisted is presented, Vidal aligns his representation of the 'body' only with the former, as a terrain which is regulated on a level that is tied ideologically to Christianity and specifically to the teachings of Saint Paul in the New Testament. Thus the 'body' in *Artorius* is invested with the need for self-denial, sacrifice and discipline, to resist the desires of the flesh and maintain purity of mind and soul, as this is the only way to achieve spiritual salvation. To explicate Vidal's concept of the 'body' an analysis will be made of the female characters of the novel.

Chapter 9 will bring together the findings of each of the core chapters, all of which confirm that both novels use their **intertextuality** as a tool to **manipulate** a desired reading of their texts and as a vehicle to convey their particular ideological messages. The novels' paratexts are also concluded to be a potent space where such authorial manipulation occurs. The chapter will restate the thesis's finding that intertextuality functions differently in each novel. With respect to *ERDSG* it opens up the reader's imagination allowing an alternative feminine reading of the novel, whereas in *Artorius* intertextuality is combined with rhetorical techniques that define it as a work of **propaganda**. This combination of findings leads to the overall conclusion of the thesis which is that the employment of the motifs, characters and storylines of the Arthurian legend remain an effective literary vehicle that can be used by authors to

²³ *The Cost of Freedom*.

advance particular ideological agendas and enhance the understanding of the cultural and political issues faced by a particular society at any given time.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

The literature selected for this review will provide a selection of the scholarly work that will assist this thesis's argument that the motifs, characters and storylines of the Arthurian legend continue to be an effective tool for authors to criticize and express their opinions on the contemporary political, social and cultural issues of their age. By choosing to highlight how this functions in two contemporary Arthurian Spanish novels, *ERDSG* (1984) by Paloma Díaz-Mas and *Artorius* (2006) by César Vidal, this thesis will help redress the dearth of academic interest in the contribution of contemporary Spanish writers to the Arthurian field. As Spanish Arthurian scholars Zarandona Fernández and Sanz Mingo have pointed out, Spanish Arthurian literature written both in Castilian Spanish or any other of the country's languages is practically unknown by Spanish and foreign readers, in spite of the interest and enthusiasm for Arthurian stories shown by well-respected and popular contemporary Spanish authors.²⁴

Section 1 of the review will provide a brief, general overview of the landscape of postmedieval Arthuriana and its impact on popular culture. Following this, there will be a sub-section that specifically focuses on this phenomenon on the Iberian Peninsula. Section 2 will consist of a presentation of the rationale for selecting *ERDSG* and *Artorius* as case studies for this thesis. The key theoretical concepts and approaches that will be used in the analysis of the case studies will be presented in Section 3. Section 4 will conclude the chapter, present the questions that will be addressed in the analysis of the case studies and indicate what will follow in the succeeding chapters.

24. See Zarandona Fernández 2015, chapter XII, 435-445 for a comprehensive list of modern Arthurian works written in the languages of Spain.

1. Postmedieval Arthuriana

In the introduction to this thesis, it was pointed out that the English poet Alfred, Lord Tennyson and his opus *Idylls of the King* (1859-1885) has generally been credited with the pan-European comeback of the Arthurian legend. Scholars suggest that after the last great Arthurian work of the Middle Ages, Sir Thomas Malory's *Le Morte D'Arthur* (1485), there had been a decline in interest in Arthur and his exploits. The period between the 16th and the 18th centuries, often referred to as the 'Dark Age' of Arthuriana, was a time when authors tended to reject everything 'medieval', including the Arthurian legend. However, Arthurian literature did not completely come to a halt with Malory and resume with Tennyson as a small number of works with Arthurian references were composed during this time. These mainly appeared in chapbooks, broadsides and burlesque literature. Arthur's appearances in comic folklore stories became increasingly frequent, an example of which is Henry Fielding's *The Tragedy of Tragedies; Or, the Life and Death of Tom Thumb the Great* (1731). Arthurian references also occurred in the poems *Lady of the Lake* (1810) and *The Bridal of Triermain* (1813)²⁵ by Sir Walter Scott. Amongst other artistic forms with Arthurian influences the semi-opera *King Arthur, or The British Worthy* (1691) stands out. This was composed by Henry Purcell with a libretto written by John Dryden.

Tennyson's *Idylls* also impacted hugely on the art world. In 1859 the French artist Gustave Doré was commissioned to illustrate Tennyson's poems, giving the work great popular appeal, whilst a later edition in 1874 included a series of early experimental photographs by Julia Margaret Cameron. Tennyson's poems inspired other great pictorial works by artists such as William Dyce and his Arthurian murals in the Queen's Robing Room (1848-1864), Dante Gabriel Rossetti's *King Arthur's Tomb* (1854), William Morris's *The Defence of Guenevere* (1858) and Edward Burne-Jones's *Arthur in Avalon* (1880-1898). The popularity of the German composer Richard Wagner's Arthurian operas, *Tristan and Isolde* (1865) and *Parsifal* (1882)

²⁵ These poems can be read on line at <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/3011/3011-h/3011-h.htm>
<https://d.lib.rochester.edu/camelot/text/scott-bridal-of-triermain>

must also be mentioned as a cultural form that played its part in once again promoting Arthuriana. Interestingly, the only Arthurian novel of the 19th century was Sir Thomas Love Peacock's *The Misfortunes of Elphin*, a satire in which contemporary affairs are compared to the barbarism of 6th century Britain.

Scholars often speak of the 'elasticity' of the Arthurian legend, a quality that has guaranteed its survival into the modern era. Music, art, film, popular literature for children and adults alike, comics, and even video games are cultural forms to which the Arthurian legend has successfully adapted in the 20th and 21st centuries. Cinema has provided some of the most popular and enduring contemporary contributions to Arthuriana. From the earliest Arthurian film *Parsifal* in 1904 to the present day, Arthur and his entourage continue to be represented on the big screen as well as television. Marion Zimmer Bradley's novel *The Mists of Avalon* (1983) was adapted for television and made into a mini-series, and from 2008-2012 the BBC run a popular series called *The Adventures of Merlin*. Some recent Arthurian cinematic examples include Antoine Fuqua's *King Arthur* (2004), Guy Ritchie's *King Arthur: Legend of the Sword* (2017) and the very recent *The Kid who would be King* (2019) in which a young boy finds King Arthur's sword Excalibur and must then use it to stop an ancient enchantress from destroying the world. The Arthurian story's appeal to the imagination of artists and creative writers has no limits. All societies and cultures can remodel Arthur in whatever image they choose and adapt the legend for a myriad of purposes whether political, religious or feminist.

1. 2 Modern Arthuriana on the Iberian Peninsula

It is also generally considered that the Matter of Britain did not make a come back on the Iberian Peninsula until the second half of the 19th century. However, Zarandona Fernández (2015) has highlighted that recent findings indicate that the legend did indeed manage to surmount the lean years of Arthurian production. As early as 1830, the novelist Ramón López-Soler (1806-1836) had published *Los bandos de Castilla o el caballero del Cisne*.²⁶ This work contained several Arthurian elements and a number of Arthurian characters such as Merlin and Lancelot. There were also

²⁶ *The Factions of Castile or The Swan Knight*.

references to the medieval Spanish romance *Amadís de Gaula* and other knights from Spanish romances of chivalry. In Portugal, Camilo Castelo Branco (1825-1890) produced two novels inspired by the tale of Tristan and Isolde, *Memórias de Guilherme do Amaral* (1863)²⁷ and *O Sangue. Romance* (1868).²⁸ Nevertheless, the major impetus for the renewed interest in Arthuriana in Spain was, without a doubt, Tennyson's collection of poems *The Idylls of the King*. The Barcelona publishing house Montaner y Simón, wishing to replicate the success of Tennyson's *Idylls* on Spanish soil, commissioned the Spanish poet José Zorrilla to translate Tennyson's poems but instead of translating the *Idylls* as planned, Zorrilla wrote a verse history of Catalonia. As previously mentioned in Chapter 1, the result of this was a work entitled *Los ecos de la montañas* (1868), the last chapter of which *Los encantos de Merlín* was inspired by the Arthurian character Vivien. After Tennyson, Lope Gisbert (1823-1888) published two translations of Tennyson's *Idylls*, *Lancelot and Elaine* and *Geraint and Enid*. Vicente de Arana (1848-90), also mentioned in Chapter 1, translated many of the *Idylls* in 1883 and in the same year the Galician José Ojea (1845-1909) published *Célticos. Cuentos y leyendas de Galicia*,²⁹ a volume that contained a legend called *Énide*. The novelist and intellectual Benjamín Jarnés (1888-1949) came to enjoy Arthurian literature thanks to Vicente Arana's translations of Tennyson and went on to produce his own Arthurian works *Viviana y Merlín. Leyenda* (1929)³⁰ and *Viviana y Merlín. Novela* (1936).³¹ In these novels, Jarnés makes references to Spain and Spanish culture and creates intertextual links to *Don Quijote* and *El baladro del sabio Merlín*.³² The Matter of Britain and the legends of Camelot have been a favourite topic for many Galician writers.

As Zarandona Fernández (2017) points out, translation has always been an extremely important medium through which medieval, modern and contemporary Iberian people have enjoyed the Arthurian legend. Throughout the early 20th and 21st centuries a consistent number of Arthurian works have been translated into the

²⁷ *Guilherme of Amaral's Memoirs*.

²⁸ *Blood. A Romance*.

²⁹ *Celtic Tales and Legends of Galicia*.

³⁰ *Vivien and Merlin. A Legend*.

³¹ *Vivien and Merlin. A Novel*.

³² *The Cry of Merlin the Wise*.

Spanish language. In the 1980s, two Spanish publishing houses, Editorial Siruela and Alianza Editorial, took the lead in producing a number of Arthurian texts in translation, which were very successful. Any contemporary Anglo-American or French Arthurian fiction is almost immediately translated into Spanish to satisfy the demand for Arthurian literature in Spain. Yet, there are many examples of modern Arthurian literature that have been written in several of the languages native to Spain and in Portuguese and this cannot be overlooked. For instance, the prolific output in both Spanish and Galician of Álvaro Cunqueiro (1911-1981), a Galician author who is said to be the most important modern Iberian writer of Arthuriana. His works include *El año del cometa con la batalla de los cuatro reyes*³³ (1974) and *Merlín e familia e outras historias*³⁴ (1996). In 1972, another Galician, Gonzalo Torrente Ballester (1910-1990), published *La saga/fuga de J.B.*,³⁵ a work that is an outstanding example of the experimental post-structuralist style. Xosé Ramón Loureiro Calvo (1965-) who writes in Galician and Spanish has also published a recent spate of Arthurian novels. Like Cunqueiro, he always features Merlin as a character in his novels and locates his narratives in the Land of Escandoi, or mythical North Galicia. Of course, it is important not to omit the contribution of Spanish female authors to the canon. Ana María Matute (1925-2014), a popular Catalan realist writer wrote two fantasy romances of chivalry set in the Middle Ages that are very close to Arthurian literature and Victoria Cirlot (1955-) published her *Historia del Caballero Cobarde y otros relatos artúricos*³⁶ in 2011 in which she relates the adventures of many of the Arthurian heroes. Also, between 2008 and 2011, Gemma Lienas started to publish a whole series of adventure books for children in Catalan and Spanish under the series title *La tribu de Camelot*.³⁷ Hal Foster's popular American comic book strip *Prince Valiant* set in Arthurian times has also been translated for a Spanish readership and has a Spanish spin-off in the form of *El Capitán Trueno*³⁸ illustrated by Miguel Ambrosio and text by Victor Mora. These are full of Arthurian motifs and intertextualities. The enthusiasm for Arthuriana also extends into Latin America. As

33 *The Year of the Comet with the Battle of the Four Kings.*

34 *Merlin and Family and Other Stories.*

35 *The Saga/Flight of J.B.*

36 *The Story of the Cowardly Knight and Other Arthurian Tales.*

37 *The Camelot Tribe.*

38 *Captain Thunder.*

noted in the introduction to this thesis, in 1996, the Argentinian writer Graciela Montes published a complete retelling of the Arthurian cycle for children in nine volumes under the general title *Los caballeros de la Tabla Redonda*.³⁹ Writers from Colombia, Nicaragua, Peru, Chile and Brazil have also produced Arthurian works of great quality. The limited list of examples provided above is evidence that a modern Iberian Arthurian tradition most certainly exists and consists of the output of many excellent and well-known Iberian writers.⁴⁰

2. The Case Studies

ERDSG and *Artorius* have been chosen as case studies to demonstrate the innovative ways in which contemporary Spanish authors continue to rework the legend in their native language. Written twenty-two years apart, they reflect the general literary trends that were prevalent and popular in Spain at the time of writing. *Artorius* is an example of the historical novel so much in vogue in Spain over recent decades and takes its place amongst those reincarnations of the Arthurian myth that attempt to reveal the ‘truth’ of the legend. However, the most influential motive in choosing to study *Artorius* is the hypothesis, first suggested by Dr Carlos Sanz Mingo, that the novel could be a veiled allegorical commentary of the social and political situation in Spain in 2004 during the first term of Prime Minister José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero. This idea is a fascinating one that demands further study and as the novel has attracted virtually no other academic attention the scope for original research is clear. The novel’s abundant use of intertextual references presents itself as a most interesting topic for analysis. It has, therefore, been decided to focus on this area to examine the theory that the rhetorical techniques employed by César Vidal are used to **manipulate** the Arthurian story and characters in order to accommodate his personal creed of social ideals and morals. The literary analysis will seek to demonstrate that the message of *Artorius* contains a criticism of contemporary Spanish society for falling short of the high moral and social standards set in the mythical Arthurian ‘Golden Age’. In this way, the novel aligns itself to those accounts

³⁹ *The Knights of the Round Table*.

⁴⁰ Zarandona Fernández’s compilation of modern Iberian Arthurian works provides many more examples. See footnote 24 of this chapter.

of Arthur throughout the ages that incorporate a didactic and **propagandistic** message and a clear sense of action and moral direction for the receivers of the story.

Paloma Díaz-Mas's very different approach to and treatment of the Arthurian legend, therefore, provides the opportunity for a contrastive and comparative literary study of the two novels. Contrary to Vidal César's portrayal of the mythical Arthurian age as an idyllic period, Díaz-Mas looks back to the era with the critical, sceptical eye of the postmodern author. Her parodic and ironic recasting of Chrétien de Troyes's *Le Conte du Graal* trivializes and ridicules the great Arthur and his cohort of knights and shows little respect for the most holy and symbolic Arthurian motif, The Grail. Despite its brevity, the novel took four years to write and every page is permeated with a myriad of Spanish cultural intertextual references that also invite exploration and analysis. An analysis of *ERDSG* will offer the chance to study the **manipulation** of the Arthurian story, its motifs and characters from another perspective with a different ideological viewpoint. It will be to the **intertextual** spaces of the novel that this thesis will look to investigate the rhetorical techniques that Paloma Díaz-Mas uses in her demythification of the legend.

3. Key Theoretical Concepts and Approaches for analysing the Case Studies

3.1 Intertextuality

There are many definitions of intertextuality and the concept 'has come to have almost as many meanings as users' (Irwin 2004, 227), but in simple terms, it can be explained as the shaping of a text's meaning by another text. The decision to study *ERDSG* and *Artorius* through an intertextual lens is an appropriate analytical tool to choose, given that the intertextual links within the Arthurian tradition are elaborate and plentiful. Medieval Arthurian texts consistently borrowed from one another, appropriating characters and themes and even direct citations. For example, Whitaker (1990, 6) has suggested that Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia*, the first text to create a pseudo-historical biography for Arthur, bears the traces of many previous texts, including ancient Celtic legends. Many medieval Arthurian writers did not highly prize originality in their work but were content to present variations on

already well-known structures, themes and motifs. For instance, when Wace translated Geoffrey's *Historia* into French, in the form of the *Roman de Brut* (c.1155), he developed the persona of Arthur, changing him from warlord to chivalric hero, making him more pleasing to the tastes of the contemporary Norman court, and attempting to make the *Historia* more popular in this cultural milieu. This practice of embellishment, expansion and adaptation of previous versions of the Arthurian legend has therefore been a commonplace occurrence, and, as Hogenbirk (2017) points out, by the time the Arthurian romances appeared in the 12th century it was usual for authors to use intertextuality freely and intentionally to reflect on contemporary social issues, gender relations and power structures.

The 20th century proved to be a period in which theorising about intertextuality and its usefulness as a tool for textual analysis became prevalent. Such a wide range of attitudes emerged towards the concept that it is almost impossible to deal with it without taking into consideration the opinions of a number of theorists. Julia Kristeva coined the term intertextuality in her essays 'Word, Dialogue and Novel', first written in 1966 and 'The Bounded Text' written between 1966-7. Here, Kristeva declared that texts did not present stable and clear meanings, as meaning can always be said to be 'inside' and 'outside' the text at the same time. Thus, to interpret a text, and discover its meaning, requires the tracing of the relations that exist between the independent text and all the other texts to which it relates. From her theoretical perspective, the focus is deflected away from the author as the producer of meaning in the text to the idea of textual productivity, a space where ideas are not presented as fully formed consumable products and where the reader becomes an integral part of the reading process and the establishment of meaning. A text's intertexts provide the reader with infinite ways of deciphering texts because it considers all texts, not as a closed network, but as an open product containing the traces of other texts. This celebration of the freedom of constraint of all readers is characteristically poststructural.

Kristeva's theory of intertextuality owes much to the ideas of the linguist Ferdinand de Saussure (1857-1913) and the literary theorist Mikhail Bakhtin (1895-1975). Saussure's contribution to language was dedicated to understanding how meaning was made, how it could be understood, and to finding the fundamental structures that

allow these things to occur. He stressed the arbitrariness of the link between the word or image, 'the signifier', and the concept to which it refers, the 'signified' (Saussure 1960, 67). Arguing that 'signifiers' could be attached to many different 'signifieds', he concluded that the meanings we produce and find in language are always relational, and depend upon processes of combination and association with other signs in a language system. Saussure's theory was, however, confined within a structuralist framework and tended to focus on the individual text as a closed-off identity, with its search for meaning exclusively within the text. Bakhtin felt that Saussure's theory only explained language in a synchronic system and missed the point that language exists in specific social situations and is bound up with specific social evaluations (Allen 2011, 16). In *The Dialogic Imagination*, first published in 1975, Bakhtin proposed that all language is dialogical, or double-voiced. A dialogic text is informed by many other works and voices, in which no individual discourse stands above any other discourse. However, its opposite, a monologic text, will adopt one perspective and then integrate all ideology and values through plot and characters to this perspective, closing down the world it represents by claiming to be the ultimate word. Monologism, or single-thought discourse, is characteristic of traditional writing and thought, and forms the basis of communication that involves control and manipulation. Bakhtin's concept of the dialogic and monologic text will be used as a benchmark with which to compare the different text types of *ERDSG* and Artorius.

Kristeva's post-structuralist contemporaries Roland Barthes (1915-1980) and Jacques Derrida (1930-2004) also employed the term intertextuality to disrupt the meaning of the text. Barthes, famous for his essay 'The Death of the Author' published in 1968,⁴¹ claimed in 'Theory of the Text' (1981) that the text could not be seen as a repository of an unconscious hidden meaning that originates in the author: instead, the author was only a vehicle for the telling of the story, a recycler of ideas, which are always imitative and never original. In 'Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences' (2001, [1967]), Derrida also argued that clarity of meaning could not be determined in the text. He posited that there could not be truth in language because any signifier or word has no completeness, as it always needs other

41 The essay 'The Death of the Author' is collected in *Image-Music-Text* (1977).

signifiers to understand it. Derrida questioned how Man has come to think about and make sense of the world in terms of binary oppositions, for example, mind/body, culture/nature, and male/female. He asserted that these hierarchical binaries, in which the first term tends to be privileged over the others, are not true representations of external reality but man-made constructions, which historically have privileged certain values and arguments over others in order to formulate some central truth, which is subject to historical change. A fixed centre, referred to as the 'transcendental signifier' or the sign that gives meaning to all others, regulates the structure of the binary opposition. This centre has historically been considered the anchor point for some ultimate word, essence or truth, which has then acted as the foundation point for all our thought, language and experience. But Derrida claimed that the immutability of the centre is impossible because of language's characteristic 'free play' of signifiers. Derrida argued that hierarchical binaries have set the standard for many of the stereotypes and inequalities that have persisted in Western society. In doing so, he raised questions and opened up the debate about feminism and woman's place in the world and this is an important theme that will feature in the analysis of *ERDSG*. In addition, both Derrida and Barthes's ideas on language and the role of the author in the text will be incorporated into this thesis's discussion on authorial intention.

In 'Against Intertextuality' (2004) Irwin suggested that the reason scholars such as Kristeva, Barthes and Derrida rejected the authority and creativity of the author and dismissed the possibility of any truth or clarity in the text was because they believed that language and literature were being used as a weapon by the powerful élite to misrepresent or conceal the truth and 'to pull the wool over the collective eyes of the people' (Irwin 2004, 231). The academics' attack on the validity of the concept of the 'transcendental signifier' and their insistence on the instability of signifiers and signified, allowed them to question the foundations of 'Justice', 'Truth', 'Authority' and 'Equality' in society. Their ideas on language and the literary text were highly politically charged, as they constituted a means of counteracting the principal way in which dominant ideology had always maintained its power and repressed revolutionary thought.

The importance of reading intertextually is that it allows other preoccupations felt by authors to come to the fore and become central to the story. An intertextual reading of *ERDSG* and *Artorius* will help cast light on the worries, passions and ideological stance of their authors which may in the first instance not be immediately clear in their texts. The application of this approach will reveal how the process of text composition can reveal authorial intention whilst at the same time allowing for the reader's role in producing the meaning of the text. The disadvantage of relying on intertexts to help establish meaning is that it requires specialist knowledge from the reader. That is why it is important that if authors wish to be successful in conveying a particular message they have to use certain literary techniques in order to manipulate the reading of the text. An awareness of these techniques will be essential for the literary analyses of the case studies.

3. 2 Manipulation: Gérard Genette's Theory of the Paratext

Another strand within theories of intertextuality takes a different approach to the relationship between readers and the literary text. Gérard Genette, amongst others, argued that it is possible to locate and fix literary meaning in the text. His approach to the text not only focusses on the reader in the establishment of meaning but on the author and his 'allies', who include the publisher, the editor and all those who may influence the reception of his work. For Genette the importance of textual analysis lay not in the singularity of the text but in its architextuality, a term he used to describe the 'entire set of general or transcendent categories - types of discourse, modes of enunciation, literary genres - from which emerges each singular text' (Genette 1997a, 1). He subsumed architextuality into his theory of 'transtextuality', which was his system of showing how texts can be systematically interpreted and understood. Of the five types of transtextuality that include architextuality, intertextuality, paratextuality, metatextuality, and hypertextuality, paratextuality has been the most interesting for the analysis of both *ERDSG* and *Artorius*. The paratext is any text that surrounds and supports the core text. Although not officially part of the text, the paratext can have a significant influence over the way a text is received. It can never be objective as it always adds or changes the text in some way and shapes the readers' perception of the text. The paratext is made up of the peritext which includes

titles, forewords, prefaces, author's notes, epilogues, footnotes, endnotes, illustrations or photographs and the epitext which denotes elements that are outside the physical book, such as interviews, reviews, diaries etc. Genette maintained that paratexts are essential for the comprehension of the text and necessary if we are to understand the work in the way the author wishes. In *Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation* (1997b) he examined the structure and evolution of the paratext and also its function as a zone of transaction where a sender (the author, publisher) transmits a message to an addressee (the reader). This message may have an illocutionary force (of warning, advising etc.), which will affect the way the reader will receive the text. Genette (1997b, 406) also recognised the importance of the visual or non-verbal paratext in that it can have an impact as great as the written word in its potential to be able to alter and shape readers' perceptions of a text, but this is not an area that he fully developed. Genette's approach to the understanding of the text will be used in the analysis of the two case studies. The paratexts often reach the reader before the actual text does and in this way may exert a considerable influence on the reader's reception of the text. Particular attention will be paid to the peritextual spaces of each novel. With relation to *ERDSG* this will focus on the book's title and front cover illustration. In the case of *Artorius* the author's notes, the laudatory publisher's information on the inside and back cover of the novel, along with the prologues that preface each of the chapters will be analysed. Information will also be gathered from epitextual sources such as articles, interviews, Internet blogs etc which may be useful in interpreting the texts.

3. 3 Authorial intention

Any critical analysis of *ERDSG* and *Artorius* cannot be pursued with indifference to their authors. This thesis will investigate whether the intertextual connections waiting to be discovered within the novels have been inserted intentionally and meant to be recognised in order to aid interpretation. Considered in this way, intertextuality can be considered a highly artistic, creative and manipulatory process on the part of the author, which is then released as a form of interaction between the author and the reader. The existing knowledge of the reader, who is situated in a certain cultural and historical position, is then also a determinant in giving meaning

to the text, thus making the reading process an active endeavour between author and reader. Whilst the remit of this thesis will not extend to an in-depth analysis on the subject of authorial intention in textual interpretation, it will be important to keep this counterview in mind when considering the role that intertextuality plays in the novels. For this purpose, it will be helpful to recall the distinction between meaning and significance, introduced by E.D. Hirsch Jr. (1967). Irwin (2004, 234-235), explains Hirsch's argument, namely, that there is an important distinction to be noted between what an author intends, a text's meaning, and that intended meaning as it relates to the interests of the readers, a text's significance. According to Hirsch's intentionalism, the author does indeed supply meaning, but this does not restrict readers, who can read the text however they like, as long as they do not represent their particular reading as the author's intention. In *The Death and Return of the Author* Seán Burke argues that neither of the opposing sides in the anti-authorial debate has entered into a truly academic discussion about the issue. As he says: 'The problem of the author is thus sustained as a source of deep controversy, but does not surface as the site of common discussion' (Burke 2008, 17). Burke suggests that the critical examination of a work of literature does not have to involve a choice between either the author, as the determining centre of the work, or the complete absence of the author. Indeed, he states: 'criticism can in practice read a text in terms of its tropes, aporias, rhetorics, words on the page and also read in terms of biography, psychological dynamics, authorial inscription, and do so without obvious contradiction', but also adds 'that the propagation of a theory of reading and of writing which takes stock of all these determinants is awesomely difficult to conceive' (Burke 2008, 183).

4. Propaganda Theory and The Roman à Thèse

An important theoretical framework that will be employed in the analysis of *Artorius* will be the model of the *roman à thèse* or thesis novel, as described by Susan Suleiman in *Authoritarian Fictions: The Ideological Novel as a Literary Genre* (1983). According to Suleiman, the *roman à thèse* sets itself apart from other forms of literature by the presence of a doctrinal intertext, a rule of action addressed to the reader, and an unambiguous, dualistic set of values. These three elements are embedded in the text by the copious use of the literary strategy of redundancy, by which the author

supplies the reader with a surplus of information in the form of the repetition of words, phrases or ideas to convey the same point. In 'Redundancy and the "Readable" text' (1980) Suleiman reflects upon this, along with Barthes' distinction between the 'readable' (*lisible*) and the 'writerly' (*scriptible*) text which he makes in *S/Z* (Barthes 1973, 4). According to Barthes' definition, the 'writerly' text is modern, elusive, playful and impervious to the repressive rule of structure, grammar, or logic, whilst the 'readable' text is traditional, analysable, serious, closed structured, and redundant: it imposes meaning, making the reader into a consumer, not a producer of the text (Suleiman 1983, 149). In *S/Z* Barthes associates the use of extensive redundancy with 'readable' texts, for it is through redundancy that plural meanings and ambiguities are reduced and that is the readable text's aim. Suleiman believes redundancy to be an important criterion of the *roman à thèse* as it is through this rhetorical device that the correct thesis or message of the text is imposed upon the reader at all levels of the work. However, the doctrinal element does not reside only in the commentary (Suleiman 1983, 188) but is also present in the way that the novel structures events and characters. In the *roman à thèse* the functions of events and characters are redundant with the interpretive commentary made about them either by an omniscient narrator or by a correct interpreter, and this interpreter has a precise agenda, which is to analyse, judge, persuade and impose a conviction and a line of action on the narratee (Suleiman 1983, 184). Thus, through a single and not a main character, the whole ideological line of the novel can be discovered. Suleiman refers to this technique as the amalgam and states that is one of the more transparent devices of propaganda literature. Suleiman's list of criteria for the identification of a narrative as a work of propaganda will be applied to the analysis of *Artorius*.

5. Linda Hutcheon's Theory of Postmodern Historiographic Metafiction: Parody and Irony in *ERDSG*

In the late 1980s, Linda Hutcheon coined the term historiographic metafiction to describe works of fiction that combine metafiction, a type of fiction in which the author self-consciously draws attention to the artificiality of the literary form, and historical fiction. Juana A. Hernández (1990) and Elizabeth J. Ordóñez (1991) have defined *ERSDG* as a work of postmodern historiographic metafiction due to its

characteristic postmodern traits of intertextuality, self-reflexivity and humour achieved by parody and irony. Ordóñez underlines Díaz-Mas's subversive use of humour achieved through irony and parody to undermine the patriarchal system and provides an invaluable aid to the identification of many of the references to Spanish intertexts that are found in the narrative. Hernández's paper on the evidence of the postmodern in the fiction of Paloma Díaz-Mas provides a comprehensive list of features that identify the novel with the genre. John Macklin (2010) provides an overview of the concerns of the novel and highlights Paloma Díaz-Mas's interest in the processes of literature and the games that can be played in narrative writing using parody and irony. Macklin emphasises the novel's serious message and its use of intertextuality to create parallels between the medieval and the modern world, asserting that Díaz-Mas uses the medieval world as a prism through which to reflect on constants in human behaviour, such as the search for the meaning of life. Also highlighted are her use of irony and parody to demythify Arthurian military values and expose the cruelty of the chivalric codes of honour, whilst focusing on the victims and marginalised of history.

Hutcheon's book, *A Theory of Parody: The Teachings of Twentieth Century Art Forms* (2000a) is an important study on the way parody (always a double-voiced discourse), and its close relation irony, function as rhetorical mechanisms in the text. *Parody* is often joined to the manipulative voice of the author within a narrative, which then may overtly or covertly manoeuvre the reader into the desired reception of the text (Hutcheon 2000a, 86). *Irony's Edge* (1994), Hutcheon's earlier work on the mechanisms involved in irony separates the elements that work together to ensure the ironic transaction: its critical edge; its semantic complexity; the discursive communities needed to make irony happen; the role of intention and attribution of irony; its contextual framing and markers. She explains that irony always expresses an attitude or value judgement on the part of the author or ironist that at the same time intends to arouse an emotion in the receiver or reader. A close analysis of irony's ideological 'bite' or 'edge' will be applied to the textual interpretation of *ERDSG*.

In *A Poetics of Postmodernism* (2000b) Linda Hutcheon claims that historiographic metafiction incorporates a theoretical self-awareness of both history and fiction as

human constructs and, therefore, cannot be relied upon to provide a true representation of the past. Kathleen Glenn (2001) speaks of Díaz-Mas's similar concerns about the validity of literary and historical knowledge and the impossibility of a stable representation of society. Glenn opines: 'Historiographic metafiction demonstrates that history, like fiction, constructs its object and is inevitably partial - both incomplete and biased - in that it is not an objective recording but a construction and interpretation of past events that reflects the attitude of the historian towards his or her material' (Glenn 2001, 79). Hutcheon believes that parody and irony are perfect forms to reflect upon, question, challenge or criticize what is claimed to be historical truth, but this is not done destructively. Hutcheon's theoretical contribution on the working of parody and irony will aid the understanding of Paloma Díaz-Mas's use of these literary techniques throughout *ERDSG* in her critical treatment of chivalric society and deconstruction of the legend of the Holy Grail.

6. Postmodern Feminist Theories and the Representation of the 'Body'

In this thesis the analysis of the representation of the 'body' will take as its theoretical framework a balance of feminist views of the 'body' as a tool for understanding subjectivity, gender and society and how this better understanding might lead to social change. Some feminist theories focus on the importance of language in constructing subjectivity whilst others stress the role of the materiality of the 'body' and these differing theories will be applied to the case analyses. A particular focus for the analysis of the language of *ERDSG* will be on a type of feminist writing called *écriture féminine* that was coined by the French feminist Hélène Cixous in 'The Laugh of the Medusa' (1976). Here, Cixous expounds the idea that women must use writing and language as a means of authority, as a weapon to reject their historical relegation to the inferior space on the binary divide, which has created a hierarchy of sexual difference within language and discourse. *Écriture féminine* is by nature subversive and disruptive. It has the ability to unsettle the security and stability of patriarchal language by the use of wordplay, puns, fragmented syntax and many-voiced discourse which all serve to create a language which is fluid, never-ending and open. For Cixous, this type of feminine writing can help women escape (what she terms a 'sortie') to somewhere else beyond the oppressive identities of the discriminatory binarisms as

described by Derrida. Utilising the ideas of Jacques Lacan and Freud that the phallus centres the structure of language, Cixous argues that in the symbolic order,⁴² the subject position of 'woman' is on the margins and thus less firmly controlled by the phallus. In Cixous's view, to reject their designated place in the symbolic order (which is composed of language and the law) women must write their own literature, through their own bodies, thus shattering the place of repression and silence. Linda Gould Levine (1993) also talks about the problem of language and the verbalization of female desire as an obstacle that women writers face in their attempt to inscribe the female body in a different space; however, hers is a sceptical view in that she wonders that if desire in literature is necessarily mediated through the prism of language, how then can women authors escape the confines of patriarchal thought and articulate the richness of their own experience? An illuminating insight into how language is affected when a body is subjected to pain is contained in *The Body in Pain. The Making and Unmaking of the World* (1987) by Elizabeth Scarry. An understanding of this effect will be helpful in the analysis of the female knight's death scene in *ERDSG*.

6.1 The Socially Constructed 'Body'

In the 1970s the French philosopher Michel Foucault presented another perspective on the understanding of the repression of the female body, which offered an alternative to the idea of man as the oppressor wielding power over women, who are deemed as being powerless. Foucault's ideas about the relations between power, the 'body' and sexuality were welcomed by feminists as now the human body was imagined as a politically inscribed entity, marked by histories and practices of containment and control. In *Discipline and Punish* (1991) he presents his 'docile bodies' thesis, which suggests that humans with institutionalised 'docile bodies' were produced as a result of the system of disciplinary power that grew up in institutions, such as prisons, schools and hospitals. The well trained and passive 'docile bodies' produced were obedient to rules, able to exert a strong sense of self-discipline and

42 As mentioned earlier, this is the world of linguistic communication into which we must all enter as children in order to be able to deal with others. During the pre-linguistic Mirror Phase the child experiences a sense of completeness thanks to its identification with the mother, but must then break the maternal bond which creates a pattern of desire and anxiety. The child then enters the through the acquisition of language.

thus become useful and obedient members of society. His 'docile bodies' thesis was seen as a convincing explanation for women's compliance with the standards of femininity set by patriarchal society.

Judith Butler's approach to the body in *Gender Trouble* (1990), called for a new way of looking at sex, gender and inequality. She believes that until sex differences are disregarded and people cease to be classed as either male or female then true equality is not possible. She suggests that if we deconstruct the way society views gender roles, this might change patriarchal society, reshape political culture, and thus improve women's situation in society. According to Butler, there is no inner truth about gender (Butler 1988, 519): it is not a core aspect of our identity but rather a performance that is required by societal norms. As these norms have been artificially constructed through discourse they cannot have any claim to historical truth but are simply perpetuated by continual re-enactment. Arguing that a woman does not necessarily feel feminine all of the time, any more than a man feels masculine all of the time, she suggests that gender should be regarded as fluid and variable. Butler implies that gender identities can be made and re-made at will and her main metaphor for this subversive act is drag. However, critics of Butler's theory have suggested that 'gender trouble' works on too small a scale to have a noticeable impact and is unrealistic because few people regularly have the opportunity to subvert conventional notions of gender identity. The concepts of '*écriture féminine*', 'docile bodies' and 'performativity'⁴³ will all contribute to the understanding of the feminist element in *ERDSG*.

7. Humour Theory

Humour or 'joking' in discourse is a potent tool that confirms individual agency in language. As Bellver (1996) has pointed out, in the 1980s, female Spanish authors began to use humour, generated through parody, irony and caricature to deconstruct patriarchal values and demythify masculine patriarchal discourse. This thesis will apply Susan Purdie's theory on humour as explained in *Comedy: The Mastery of*

⁴³ Performativity is the power of language to effect change. Judith Butler links performativity to gender suggesting that gender is not a 'thing' but a process by which patterns of language in action come to repeat themselves.

Discourse (1993) to consider the workings of humour at the level of discourse in *ERDSG* as her ideas on what constitutes funniness in language, in keeping with the nature of the other theoretical frameworks used to analyse *ERDSG*, are rooted in the subversive possibilities of language. Influenced by the work of Saussure and Lacan, Purdie suggests that all comedy stems from a transgression of language use that involves the violation of the 'Rule of Language'. She claims that, in the mechanism of joking, comic incongruities, innuendo and pun are made possible by the multiple generation of a word's 'signifieds' and is an important expression of our desire to return to the pleasures of the Mirror Phase, our pre-linguistic state (Purdie 1993, 35). Also crucial in the execution of any successful verbal joke, there has to be a discursive relationship between the joke Teller and the Audience. Purdie's model emphasises both the symbolic mastery of the author at the linguistic level and also the symbolic competence of readers when they recognise the semantic transgression of the joke. In *ERDSG* Purdie's theory will cast light on how humour is created linguistically through the use of dialogic speech in the form of puns and double-entendres as they occur in the narrative.

8. The Merits of *Artorius* as an Historical Novel

In order to evaluate *Artorius* as an historical novel it will be important to reflect on the nature of the genre itself. One of the most influential books on this subject is *The Historical Novel*, first published in 1937 by György Lukács (1885-1971). Lukács believed that a true historical novel had to provide an impression of historical realism, with characters placed within a historical context and, importantly, the novel had to offer a possibility to criticise and analyse current affairs through a narration of the past. The classical form of the historical novel is an epic depicting a transformation of popular life through a set of representative human types whose lives are reshaped by sweeping social forces. The role of famous historical figures is marginal with the narrative centring instead on lesser characters, whose function is to offer an individual focus for the dramatic collision of opposing extremes between whom they stand.

Alan Munslow's *Deconstructing History* (1997) and Jerome De Groot's *Consuming History* (2009) will aid the analysis of *Artorius* by the contribution they make to the understanding of the role of the historian in writing history. Munslow examines history in the postmodern age from a deconstructionist perspective and considers the importance of history as the textual product of historians. He believes that historians, in their inferring of meaning from evidence and sources, create historical knowledge. His observations again support the idea that language is uncertain and that the knowledge we gain from it is indeterminate. Therefore, it is impossible to construct truthful narratives as historical explanations. Munslow's deconstructionist approach to the writing of historical texts, consequently, helps focus on the importance of the role of ideology and language in historical writing.

Jerome de Groot observes that as well as being a discourse of the past, history can have relevance in the present. He suggests that the modern historical novel can be employed to reflect on issues in contemporary society; to invoke the possibility of social change; to explore questions about national identity; to challenge mainstream and repressive narratives; to question the authority of recorded history or explore new ideological positions. Used in this way, the historical novel is an important political tool. However, he also points out that whilst it is the task of historical novelists to make the past recognisable to contemporary readers, they should also maintain a sense of 'otherness' which reminds the reader of the artificiality of engaging with a fictional work that tries to explain the past. Many historical authors feel obliged to point this out in paratextual commentaries, such as the author's notes because, in having to weave a story in the gaps between real historical facts, historical novelists are exposed to the risk of misrepresentation and reinvention, and might be accused even of misleading their readers, as Vidal does. De Groot also reminds us that this extratextual information plays an important part in controlling the reception of the text by the reader (de Groot 2010, 7).

The scholarship of modern historians such as Christopher Snyder, in *An Age of Tyrants, Britain and the Britons* (1998), Nicholas J. Higham in *King Arthur. Myth-Making and History* (2002), Ronald Hutton in *Witches, Druids and King Arthur* (2006), and Guy Halsall in *Worlds of Arthur* (2013) will be utilised to build an informed and

balanced opinion, from what little evidence exists, as to what Arthurian Britain might have been like in terms of its politics, culture and religion. These historians all raise questions about the reliability and factual accuracy of the medieval source texts, which include Gildas' *De Excidio et Conquestu Britanniae* (c. 540),⁴⁴ The *Historia Brittonum* (c. 828-9),⁴⁵ traditionally attributed to Nennius, the *Annales Cambriae* (c.960-80)⁴⁶ and Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia Regum Britanniae* (c.1136-1139), which are all documents upon which early scholars have tried to claim a historical basis for Arthur's existence (Halsall 2013, 51). A more accurate picture of what life might have been like in sub-Roman Britain, they suggest, can be built up from epigraphic and archaeological findings. In the chapters which follow an assessment will be made as to accuracy of the novel *Artorius's* claim to have found the '**true historical**' Arthur in the light of these experts' findings.

9. Conclusion

This chapter commenced with a review of the literature that demonstrates the renewed popularity of Arthuriana in the second half of the 19th century in Europe. However, as the literature review shows, the discovery of a small number of Arthurian works created between the 16th and 18th centuries is evidence that interest in Arthuriana did not die out completely between these dates. In the case of the Iberian Peninsula, the ballads and comedies of chivalry managed to survive through the 18th century and beyond in the form of chapbooks, many of which adapted Arthurian subject matter. Interestingly, Iberian literature and poetry with Arthurian elements have now been discovered dating from the early 19th century. This shows that Spanish and Portuguese Arthurian literature also continued to be produced without interruption into the modern era. The important and fundamental role played by translation in the contemporary period has been highlighted in this chapter, as it is mainly through translation that the Arthurian legend has become available to Iberian people. The listing of more recent examples of Iberian Arthurian output shows that it is a multilingual canon encompassing translations to Portuguese,

⁴⁴ *On the Ruin and Conquest of Britain*. This will henceforth be abbreviated to the *De Excidio*.

⁴⁵ *The History of the Britons*.

⁴⁶ *The Annals of Wales*. This will henceforth be abbreviated to the *Annales*.

Spanish, Catalan, Valencian, Galician, Asturian and Basque. As well as this, many original works of Arthuriana are also being written in these languages. Owing to the flexible nature of the legend, modern authors are able to use the motifs, characters and storylines of the Arthurian myth to reflect upon contemporary debates, societal values and ideologies that preoccupy people at a given time. The case studies *ERDSG* and *Artorius* have been presented in this chapter as paradigmatic of this use of the Arthurian legend.

As stated earlier in this chapter, reading intertextually is a valuable tool and technique as it can bring to the fore information, ideas and opinions that may not be obvious in the text. An understanding of intertextuality and how authors use it will therefore be important to formulating the arguments in this thesis. For this reason, this review chapter has highlighted some of the most important theorists on the topics of intertextuality and authorial intention. The chapter has revealed that many theorists such as Julia Kristeva, Roland Barthes and Jacques Derrida either wholly dismiss the importance of the author in determining the meaning of the text or promote the importance of the reader's role in determining meaning over the role of the author. This is a debate that will be addressed in the fabric of this thesis. The work of Gérard Genette has shown, however, that there are other ways to approach the topic of intertextuality. His theory on paratexts, those elements that lay outside the text or even outside the physical book, suggests that they can play an important part in helping to establish meaning in the text. This is an approach that will be applied to the analysis of both case studies.

This chapter has drawn special attention to the theoretical work of Linda Hutcheon on postmodern historiographic metafiction and the use of parody and irony within this genre as analytical tools to comment on, challenge or criticize the text. As stated earlier in the chapter her theoretical input will be applied to the literary analysis of *ERDSG*. Her extensive theorising on irony captures the essence of what constitutes the ironic transaction between the author and the reader and an appreciation of this will contribute to the theme of manipulation and authorial intention. Parody and irony are closely linked to humour and when humour is used irreverently or mockingly it too can be a powerful tool of criticism. Susan Purdie's insights into the mechanisms of

laughter at the level of language will enlighten the many instances of discursive humour that occur in *ERDSG*. As is the case with irony, in order for verbal humour to be successful there has to be a discursive transaction between the Teller of the joke (the author) and the Audience (the reader).

The literature identified by this review as important for the textual analysis of *Artorius* may be divided into two categories: firstly, that which will be used to assess the novel's claim to have discovered the identity of the true Arthur and secondly, that which will assist in supporting this thesis's hypothesis that *Artorius* is an allegorical work of propaganda designed to criticize the socialist government of José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero between 2004 and 2008. In the case of the former, an analysis of the aforementioned medieval Arthurian source texts along with the historical insights provided by eminent modern historians will be used to judge whether César Vidal has built up a credible possible identity for the mythical Arthur. The latter topic of propaganda which is linked to the themes of authorial intention and manipulation of the text will be supported by the work of Susan Suleiman and her treatise on the *roman à thèse* or thesis novel.

Finally, this review has presented a selection of literature chosen to explore the concept of the 'body' as it is represented both in *ERDSG* and *Artorius*. In the case analyses to be undertaken, attention will be paid to the historical subjugation of women and how this has been reflected in a hierarchy of sexual difference within language, discourse and societal norms. A number of postmodern feminist theories on the 'body' will inform the analysis of *ERDSG* on this topic whilst in *Artorius* the influence of Christianity on discourse and the 'body' will be an area of investigation.

In the following chapters, an investigation will take place into how the authors of the two case studies use intertextuality. The questions that will be asked are what is the function of said **intertextuality** and how does this differ between the two texts? Are the intertextual references being used to create new ideas and possible alternative readings of the text or simply to reinforce a particular message? In order to do this, as many intertextual links as possible will be identified in each text and commented on. The question of **authorial intention** will also be explored. An examination will take

place as to whether the placement of intertextual references by both authors is strategic and intentional and an attempt to influence, control and **manipulate** the readers' appreciation and understanding of their texts. In the case of *Artorius*, an assessment will be made as to whether the narrative meets the criteria of a work of **propaganda**. Also, attention will be focussed on the paratextual elements of the novels as additional spaces where it is possible for the authors to shape readers' opinions and influence the reading of their work. In *ERDSG*, in particular, the use of parody and irony as important and potent manipulative techniques will be observed and their function in the novel as a resistance technique against patriarchal values. A further objective will be to examine the role that intertexts play in the representation of gender and the 'body' in each of the novels and the contrasting messages articulated by the authors.

Chapters 3, 4 and 5 will be dedicated to the literary analysis of *ERDSG* whilst chapters 6, 7 and 8 are devoted to the examination of *Artorius*. Chapters 5 and 8 are linking chapters that will deal with the common theme of the representation of the 'body'. In each chapter, a detailed close reading of sections of the texts will demonstrate the application of the theories featured in this literature review to the narratives. A synopsis of what will be found in each chapter appears at the end of the introduction to this thesis.

Chapter 3: The Use of Irony in the Paratextual Elements of *El rapto del Santo Grial o El Caballero de la Verde Oliva*.

Introduction

There is a well-known adage in the English language which states that 'A picture is worth a thousand words'. This saying suggests that a complex idea or message can often be successfully and powerfully conveyed by a single or a number of images. Frequently, a reader's first point of contact with a literary work is a visual experience in the form of an illustration, adorned by a title, and the author's name. All these elements serve to extend and present the text and form part of a literary work's paratext (Genette 1997b, 1). Publishing houses today devote a great deal of care and attention to the way a literary work is presented. They are aware that the official paratextual elements that surround a literary text in the form of book covers, titles or prefaces along with the unofficial paratext or epitext, which includes interviews, conversations with authors or book reviews, can strategically influence the public's reception of a text and even change the way a text is read, understood and consumed. Genette endorses Philippe Lejeune's definition of the paratext as 'a fringe of the printed text which in reality controls one's whole reading of the text' (Lejeune cited in Genette 1997b, 2), and emphasises that these 'borderlands or fringes' importantly act as a discourse which is dedicated to the text and 'determines the essence of its appeal and existence' (Genette 1997b, 12). Genette reminds us that a book's front cover is one of the most potent and influential elements of its paratext as it is what first attracts the attention of the potential reader. However, it also has a manipulative function, which he explains in the following way:

Indeed, this fringe, always the conveyor of a commentary that is authorial or more or less legitimated by the author, constitutes a zone between text and off-text, a zone not only of transition but also of *transaction*: a privileged place of a pragmatics and a strategy, of an influence on the public, an influence that - whether well or poorly understood and achieved - is at the service of a better reception of the text and a

more pertinent reading of it (more pertinent, of course, in the eyes of the author and his allies). (Genette 1997b, 2)

This chapter will aim to examine the function of the paratextual elements of *ERDSG* specifically with regards to the book's front cover illustration, its title and subtitle. It will suggest that these areas that surround the text are characterised by the use of irony that is employed by the author to evoke a possible double reading or more of her material and manipulate a particular reception of the text by the reader. The chapter will introduce Linda Hutcheon's theory of irony with a specific focus on the concept of 'irony's edge' and the notion of 'discursive communities'. Hutcheon's theory is equally applicable as an aid to the understanding of the workings of visual irony as it is to irony at the level of discourse, which is the subject of Chapter 4.

1. The Cover Illustration

This image has been removed by the author for copyright reasons.

Design Collection:
Julio Vivas
Illustration: 'Guerrera', Sicilian puppet from the Natale Meli theatre (from the book *L'opera dei puppi*, Sellerio editore).

Image available at
https://www.google.com/search?hl=en&gl=br&tbm=isch&source=hp&biw=1440&bih=733&ei=mHX3XZGaCs6SkwX_0r6wDg&q=el+rapto+del+santo+grial&oeq=el+rapto+del+santo+

On the front cover of the 1984 edition of *ERDSG* the image of a maiden dressed in chivalric armour stands proud against a pleasant backdrop of seashore and verdant

pasture. Yet, overhead lurks an ominous and threatening sky. The maiden's long tresses, emerging from beneath her warrior's helmet, frame her sweet, doll-like face, which features a set of perfect pink, sweetheart lips: she looks fixedly at the observer through doe-like eyes, topped with immaculately arched and plucked eyebrows. To complete her ensemble, her delicate neck is swathed in a ruff of feminine lace, the traditional confection of the female hand. In her right hand she appears to hold a lance, the archetypal weapon of the perfect medieval Christian knight or *Miles Christianus*: emerging from her left hand is what appears to be a length of taut rope or string.

It may be stated with confidence that the illustration of the medieval female knight which adorns the front cover of *ERDSG* has been carefully selected either by Paloma Díaz-Mas or the publishing house Anagrama as a stand-out image to reflect the complex components of the themes that are dealt with in the novel. This point was clarified in a recent, personal email exchange with Paloma Díaz-Mas in which the author explained that for this, her first novel, and contrary to current practice, the design of the front cover was, indeed, chosen by Anagrama. Díaz-Mas believes it to have been a good choice and proof that the publishers had fully understood the subject matter and message of the novel as the following words reproduced from her email suggest: 'la ilustración, además de ser bonita y expresiva, representaba muy bien esa mezcla de literatura culta, influencias medievales y tradición popular, que está en la base de *El rapto del Santo Grial*.'⁴⁷ The image on the front sleeve of *ERDSG* is actually that of a puppet, in the form of a female knight, which is typical of the marionettes from the Sicilian *Opera dei pupi*.⁴⁸ Possibly originating from Spain or Naples, the *Opera dei pupi* is a form of prose theatre that primarily dramatizes medieval, chivalric narratives with the aid of puppetry and has been documented on the island of Sicily from the 1800s. One of Italy's most famous medieval, epic, chivalric poems, often re-enacted in these puppet shows, is *Orlando furioso* (1532) by Ludovico Ariosto which features a beautiful female Christian warrior maiden named Bradamante, who passes for a man throughout much of the action of the poem. The

⁴⁷ The illustration, apart from being attractive and expressive, represented that mix of canonical literature, medieval influences and popular tradition, which is at the heart of *El rapto del Santo Grial*. (Quote from email 6/11/2018)

⁴⁸ Puppet Theatre.

motif of the cross-dressing female warrior knight is however not limited to the literature of Italy but also has counterparts in the literature of many countries, not least in Castilian romance in the form of *El romance de la doncella guerrera*, the Spanish ballad which features prominently in *ERDSG*. Nevertheless, it was not a common occurrence for women to be portrayed in medieval literature as warriors or fighters, as exemplified in these few lines taken from a poem by the French poet Christine de Pisan (1364–1430), who is considered to have written some of the earliest examples of feminist literature:

They neither kill nor wound, nor lop off limbs,
 They do not plot, or plunder or persecute
 (De Pisan, cited in Shahar, 1983, xxi).

History tells us that in medieval society a woman's place was confined to the home and family. Generally, she was barred from holding any political, military or judicial office and expected to devote herself to her husband and bring up her children (Shahar 1983, 3). In medieval literature, which was mostly written by men, women were depicted as the inferior species, relegated to a subclass of society and with a whole range of special faults and sins attributed to them (Shahar 1983, 3). This lowly status was justified societally and ecclesiastically because all women were considered the figurative descendants of Eve, mother of sin, who had tempted Adam in the story of the Creation. Even in the 12th century when the popularity of courtly literature, often written on the inspiration and under the patronage of women, helped elevate the profile of women and counter their image as a destructive force, women did not come to enjoy a truly equal relationship with men in chivalric aristocratic society. Therefore, on viewing the front cover of *ERDSG*, even readers with only a rudimentary knowledge of medieval history would feel the strong and immediate impact of the visual irony of the book's illustration, as the image of a woman in male knightly attire that gazes back at them subverts the accepted, popular, traditional conception that knighthood was a class exclusive to the male sex in medieval society. The effect of this incongruity is enhanced when the illustration is considered in juxtaposition with the novel's title, as potential readers acquainted with the source medieval romance will realise that the Grail could never be sought and achieved by a

woman because of her association with Original Sin, but only by a male knight who was pure in body and spirit. In the first Grail romance, the fictional women depicted therein existed in the main part only to play a supporting role in the ascent and development of the male character Perceval in his, albeit incomplete, quest for the Grail. Within the quest-narrative, woman's subjective autonomy was always subsumed within the masculine adventure. She was often heroic but never the heroine.⁴⁹

1.2. The Back Cover

The back cover of a book is a strategic site that may also play a part in manipulating a reader's reception of the text. The back cover of the 1984 edition of *ERDSG* bears a summary of the novel's plot followed by this allographic textual information: 'Paloma Díaz-Mas nos cuenta una historia ambientada en la Edad Media que tal vez, afirma la autora, estamos viviendo sin saberlo'.⁵⁰ This message leaves the reader in no doubt that the work is meant to be read as a metaphor for present-day society.

2. Irony and its Discursive Communities

The ability to recognize the use of irony in any text, visual or verbal, and the level of response that it provokes, will depend on the extent of information or knowledge that the reader already possesses about the themes which the text deals with, a knowledge which is not obviously derivable from the text itself. When Hutcheon speaks of 'discursive communities' she is referring to an already existing group of readers who come to read a text sharing a factual and sociocultural background that is similar to that of the author. It is this shared background that aids the reader to detect overt or hidden quotations within the text or perceive conscious or unconscious allusions to other writers and texts, thus enabling an intertextual reading that enhances the enjoyment of the text and aids the establishment of

49 There are some infrequent examples of female knights in Medieval history. For example in 1149 the women of Tortosa in Catalonia defended their town against a Moorish siege and for their bravery were admitted to the military order of knighthood known as 'La Orden de las Damas del Hacha' ('Origen de la Orden del Hacha', accessed August 27, 2014, biblioteca.tortosa.cat/cerimafcbmd.php?id=66)

50 Paloma Díaz-Mas tells a story set in The Middle Ages which, the author declares, we may still be living without realising it.

meaning. The important players in the 'ironic game' are the author or ironist (a term used with some reservation by Hutcheon) and the reader, who is the interpreter of that irony (Hutcheon 1994, 11). It is always the success of the communicative process between these players that determines whether irony can happen because irony does not 'exist' in itself. As the potential reader's gaze takes in the details of the illustration of the cross-dressed knight, the sight of the traditional signs of femininity that spill out from beneath the very masculine space of chivalric armour may provoke a strong sense of incongruity. As already explained, what triggers this sense and its intensity will very much depend on the background knowledge, education and experience that the reader/interpreter brings to the task. It may be that the reader's sense of incongruity will stem partly from the fact that the representation in question does not concur with what history tells us of the status of women in medieval society.

However, as Hutcheon maintains, the attribution of irony is a complex affair and comes with no guarantees, as all texts whether visual or verbal are free and open to multiple interpretations. Amongst the intended audience of the ironic message, there will be the ones who 'get' or 'do not get' the irony, and in addition, there will also be some who may 'get' the irony but not in the same way as the author intended (Hutcheon 1994, 11). There also has to exist the possibility of a group of people who would take the irony quite literally: 'Otherwise there is no contrast between apparent and assumed meaning and no space for ironic play' (Culler, cited in Hutcheon 1994, 43). Hutcheon argues that irony happens not because it creates these in-groups but because these groups or 'discursive communities' already exist and provide the context for both the deployment and attribution of irony. If a reader does not understand an ironic statement it does not necessarily mean that he or she is less competent in the discourse of his or her own culture – it means that he or she is not part of the discursive community to which the person writing or uttering the statement belongs. However, Hutcheon points out that the good news is that 'we *can* learn – and be taught – enough of each other's communal contexts to enable some comprehension, without the (often dubiously pleasurable, perhaps) privacy of those secret ironic in-jokes being totally lost' (Hutcheon 1994, 97). Therefore it might be said that Hutcheon counters the conventional character of irony as an elite practice as her theory privileges the interpreter's perspective rather than the ironist's intention.

It is therefore very important for an author like Díaz-Mas who has chosen to use the legend of the Holy Grail to convey key things about the constructed and artificial nature of history and literature, about power, authority and their legitimizing grand narratives, narratives which themselves are so often grounded in social assumptions that are 'masculinist, misogynistic, socially elitist and often materialistic and violent' (Stephens and McCallum 1998, 5), to reach an appropriate discursive community who will decode her message in the correct way. Much of the responsibility for this will fall on the author's own promotion of his or her work and on the publishing house. The mark or logo of a respected publishing house is a positive influence in the reception of a text as it attributes a certain status and gravitas to it, suggesting that it is worthy to be studied and read. *ERDSG* was published as part of the collection known as 'Narrativas hispánicas' by Anagrama. This collection began in 1983 and is an on-going project and has served as a showcase for some of the most important talent to come out of Spain and Latin America in recent decades. Therefore a publisher's logo prominently displayed on the paratextual surfaces of a book can play an important part in attracting the right kind of discursive community and sending a message to the reader about how the text should be read.

2.1. The 'Scene of Irony' and 'Irony's Edge'

Let us now return to the reader and the experience at the 'scene of irony'. Hutcheon has described how an intended irony can make us feel 'edgy and nervous about how to fix meaning securely and how to determine motivation' (Hutcheon 1994, 38). Feelings of doubt and suspicion may well up in readers as to the sincerity and authenticity of what they see before them. What could be the publisher's motivation in choosing an image that shows the face of a 20th century 'Barbie Doll' encased within the trappings of a medieval warrior knight? Is there some authorial intention to hold up a mirror to contemporary life, to suggest that there is a link or parallel between modern-day woman and the medieval woman, and if so, does this representation convey a positive or negative message about women's status today? The emotional response evoked in the observer, which is described here, is characteristic of what Hutcheon means when she speaks about 'irony's edge'. It is irony's edge, she says, that 'gives parody its critical dimension in its marking of

difference at the heart of similarity' (Hutcheon 1994, 4), as it invites readers to make an evaluative judgement on what they have just read or seen.

In the case of the cover illustration of the warrior maiden the scene of irony takes place in that 'tricky, unpredictable space between expression and understanding' (Hutcheon 1994, i), which in this instance lies beyond the visual image and comes about with the realisation that the taut length of string or rope which forms a striking contrast to the erect and solid lance dominating the opposing half of the image, is, in fact, that of a puppet string.⁵¹ Once identified as such, the 'unsaid' ironic connotations of the image can be released, for it is generally recognised that a puppet's movements are controlled at the whim of a puppet master: this puppet warrior has no autonomy. With this realisation, the ironic transaction comes full cycle and the interpreter may conclude that the portrait of the *Guerrera* does not succeed in rupturing medieval gender stereotypes nor convey any spirit of female equality or triumphant feminism, but rather emits a darker message about the entrenched subordination of women. The maiden warrior's proud outward display of her feminine attributes cannot convey a message of equality or liberation, because this is negated by the restricting and constricting presence of the puppet string. When the ironic meaning is released, the illustration of the *Guerrera* comes to symbolise the idea of female entrapment and all the accompanying issues that this entails.

2.2. *La Guerrera*: An Image of Two Halves

The dual composition of the illustration *La Guerrera* hints broadly at the binary technique with which Díaz-Mas structures the whole of her novel. Every episode, every character, every discourse has its image reflected back as a parodic discourse. For example, structurally, there is the major textual hiatus created by the change from the violent, masculine, physical space of the quest for the Holy Grail and the

⁵¹ Confirmation of this can be found in the publisher's information on the very first pages of *ERDSG* which reveals that this image, entitled *Guerrera*, is taken from the book *L'opera dei puppi* and is an illustration of one of the collection of marionettes from the ancient Sicilian school of puppetry.

paradisiacal space of the Grail Castle where, as Ordóñez (1991, 160) suggests, the reader may discover the underlying feminist element already present in pre-Christian and Celtic sources of the Grail legend. As explained later in this chapter, many interpretations of the Grail material link it to ancient, pagan fertility rites and ceremonies associating it with a sexual symbolism in which the lance and the Grail were thought to have symbolised the male and female sexual organs, which in turn stood for male and female reproductive energy or 'Human Life Energy' (Weston 74, 80). The duality of the narrative is further reflected in the duplicity of Arthur, the double identity of the 'Caballero de Morado', the two opposing and conflicting desires of the young knight Pelinor in his fervent wish to find the Grail, but yet to obey the wishes of King Arthur and prevent it being found, and importantly, in the existence of two antithetical knights who both choose the name of 'El Caballero de la Verde Oliva'. As Hernández (1990) points out, the binary structure of *ERDSG* replicates the popular tradition of the Middle Ages in which the world and society were viewed through polarised ideals and concepts such as Good and Evil, Jesus and Satan, Christians and Heathens, Eve the sinner and the Virgin Mary.

The effect of the contrast between the two halves of the illustration, the erect lance, a symbol of power, strength and masculinity in the Middle Ages and the inferior attributes of fragility, flimsiness and brittleness that the material quality of string might suggest, initiates the communicative process between author and interpreter which Hutcheon tells us irony requires and enables the reader to anticipate some of the underlying themes that concern *ERDSG*, such as the themes of power, female inequality and gender politics. From this, the conceptual leap may not be too great to the identification of the lance with the phallus, and its symbolic use to signify the idea of ultimate male power and omnipotence or of the female 'lack' or sense of incompleteness according to classical Freudian and Lacanian psychoanalytic theory.

In the Grail quest section of *ERDSG*, Díaz-Mas plays with this particular ironic connotation of the lance as a symbol of male domination. For example, the poignancy of the death of the 'Caballero de Morado' is heightened by the fact that her demise comes about because, even in spite of having fought a valiant fight in defence of her principles, she ultimately loses her battle as she has no lance with which to defend

herself: 'Embrazó Pelinor su lanza y el de Morado no pudo hacer otro tanto, que lanza no tenía'⁵² (Díaz-Mas 1984, 50). However, in the second part of the text, which takes place in the Grail Castle, the lance assumes a more erotic quality and the symbolic image of the 'poderosa lanza'⁵³ of the rustic 'Caballero de la Verde Oliva' is joyfully used by Díaz-Mas as a lexical 'tool' (if the pun may be excused) to reassign '...the phallus its place as the source of female satisfaction, not domination...' (Campbell, cited in Ordóñez 1991, 160).

3. The Title

Leo H. Hoek, one of the founders of modern titology, has defined the function of the title of a book as a 'set of linguistic signs... that may appear at the head of a text to designate it, to indicate its subject matter as a whole and to entice the targeted public' (Hoek, cited in Genette 1997b, 76). However modern linguistics has informed us that signs always function in an indeterminate, ambiguous, confusing and contradictory manner and this ambiguity is evident in the interpretation of meaning in the title of Paloma Díaz-Mas's novel.

As explained in the previous chapter, Ferdinand de Saussure's idea was that a language form, or signifier does not have an innate or natural relationship with its meaning. This problematic relationship was further developed by the Russian philosopher Mikhail Bakhtin (1895 -1975) in his work on 'dialogism': 'On all its various routes toward the object, in all its directions, the word encounters an alien word and cannot help encountering it in a living, tension filled interaction [...]. A word forms a concept of its own object in a dialogic way' (Bakhtin 1981, 279). Bakhtin's insights have taught us that we must learn to distrust our words, and what we think they mean, in order to grasp the further concepts behind them.

Bakhtin's theories on the word or utterance lie at the heart of the process of interpreting any statement or text as ironic. He once called irony the 'equivocal language of modern times', for he saw it everywhere and in every form – 'from the

⁵² Pelinor grasped his lance but the Purple Knight could not do the same because she did not have a lance.

⁵³ Powerful lance.

minimal and imperceptible, to the loud, which borders on laughter' (Bakhtin, cited in Hutcheon 1994, 44). The 'dialogic' nature of any word or utterance we select as a speaker or writer always has an 'otherness' about it, he explains, because it is already embedded in a history of expressions and utterances already used by others. There are always two distinct voices present in one utterance and no word or utterance can ever be neutral because they come from already established patterns of meaning. How this utterance is decoded will depend on a person's cultural background, economic standing and personal experiences. Bakhtin explains this idea with the metaphor of the bridge, saying: 'A word is a bridge thrown between myself and another. If one end of the bridge depends on me, then the other depends on my addressee' (Bakhtin and Volosinov 1986, 95).

Bakhtin believed that in literary forms such as the novel the dialogical aspects of language were capable of unleashing a disruptive force in the text, acting as a challenge to monologic discourse and power and posing a threat to any unitary, authoritarian and hierarchical conception of society or life (Allen 2011, 29). Mikhail Bakhtin documents this in his work on the 'Carnavalesque' in which he describes how in the popular medieval celebration of 'carnival', the social hierarchical structures of everyday life were overturned and ordinary people were allowed to mock and ridicule the existing hierarchy and religious, political and moral values, norms and prohibitions through parodic language and laughter (Bakhtin 1981, 273).

In very few words, the title of Paloma Díaz-Mas's novel opens up to the potential reader an array of possible ironic interpretations. Let us first deal with the word 'el rapto' and its referents. As Hernández (1990) points out, Díaz-Mas does not elect to describe her rewriting of the chivalric adventure as a 'quest' or a 'search' for the Holy Grail, as was often the case in the medieval adaptations. Instead of using the words 'la búsqueda' or 'la demanda', she speaks of 'el rapto' which has a variety of meanings in the dictionaries of the *Real Academia Española* and *María Moliner*. These offerings range from the following: a robbery; a sudden and overpowering emotion often triggered by anger, jealousy or madness; the forced and violent abduction or kidnapping of a woman from her home and family; and, last but not least, ecstasy.

The first four possible interpretations of the word 'rapto' share a common factor in that they all evoke the sense of a violent act. In medieval romance, the Grail stories were the most religious in tone and it is made clear that only a knight who was pure and chaste could ever retrieve the Grail (a feat which was eventually achieved by Galahad in later continuations of the legend). Therefore, for the reader, another 'scene' of irony may open up at this point as he juxtaposes the idea of this holiest of artefacts becoming the object of a common theft. The effect of the choice of this word is subversive, sacrilegious, mocking or possibly humorous for some, and evokes the sense of the carnivalesque that Bakhtin has described.

Hernández (1990) and Knights (1999) propose that Díaz-Mas's use of the term 'rapto' obliges readers to consider a possible sexual connotation and consequently suggest it can mean 'rape' as well as kidnapping or abduction. Yet, the *Real Academia Española* does not include rape as a meaning of the word 'rapto'. Perhaps its connotative value in this context is better interpreted as 'The Ecstasy of the Holy Grail', an alternative that Hernández does not explore. In English and Spanish the notion of ecstasy has both religious and sexual overtones and in some cases may even encapsulate a combination of both. By way of example, the well-documented accounts of the religious ecstasies experienced by European medieval female mystics have shown that there was a very fine line between the erotic and the divine in their raptures (Shahar, 1983, 60). Similarly Dopicko-Black (2011, 109) points out that when Teresa de Jesús experienced her first religious raptures the Church authorities were unsure as to whether her ecstasies were divine, demonic or, more shockingly, carnal in nature.

Thus the inference that the hallowed object that is the Holy Grail might be considered a source of erotic pleasure provides another example of irony's edginess and stands in dialogic contrast to the equally ironic connotations of the other referents of 'el rapto'. Interpreted in this way, Díaz-Mas can make a conceptual link forward to the second part of her novel, which takes place in the castle of Acabarás, where her textual narrative delights in a more female-centred discourse that displaces the male violence of the previous section. As mentioned earlier, here she is able to return the significance of the Grail to its pre-Christian pagan roots. In pre-Christian Celtic myth

the Grail is not a cup but a cauldron associated with nourishment and life-giving powers watched over by women. In the tales of *The Mabinogion*⁵⁴ the Cauldron of Rebirth, associated with the goddess Ceridwen, was said to have given back life to dead warriors.

It is also important to consider the potential for irony that is brought to this discussion in the form of the Grail itself. The popular conception of the Holy Grail is that of a vessel, in the shape of a cup or chalice, deemed to be the Chalice of the Last Supper and the cup in which Joseph of Arimathea collected Christ's blood when he was taken down from the cross after the Crucifixion. Most readers who have been exposed to popular images of the Grail in modern literature and film might make this visual and mental connection. However, for the reader more familiar with the Arthurian legend this sign may be associated with an object of a different shape and form.

In the 12th century romance *Perceval* or *Le Conte du Graal* the mysterious object called *un graal* was introduced. In Old French *un graal* was the name given to a dish or platter that was brought to the table at various stages or servings during a meal (Lacy 1996, 212-213). The claim to its being the chalice of the Last Supper is an addition which was introduced about fifteen years later in a continuation of the Grail story by the Burgundian poet Robert de Boron. In Chrétien de Troyes's version, the receptacle carried by the Grail maiden as she follows the youths with the Bleeding Lance and the candelabra in the procession at the Grail Castle, is solely described by its appearance, a precious object worked in gold and studded with jewels, and its function, to bring a solitary Mass wafer to the old and wounded Fisher King. It is portrayed as a holy thing but is not linked to the vessel later considered to be a holy relic.

Chretien's sources and inspiration for making an object such as a *graal* the focal point of his final romance have been widely debated by scholars. The Arthurian scholar Roger Sherman Loomis (1963) pointed to the possible influence of ancient Celtic sources, in which tales of magic cauldrons watched over by women often occurred in

⁵⁴ The Mabinogion are the earliest prose stories of the literature of Wales.

Celtic mythology and Arthurian adventures. Lacy and Ashe (2009, 297) have also suggested that there are likely echoes of Celtic motifs in the imagery of the Grail, the similarity being that the Grail is also 'a wonderworking vessel that is attended by maidens'. Yet, other scholars believe it is an oversimplification to consider the Grail story merely as a development of such material (Lupack 2007, 213).

Hernández (1990), in her discussion of this, points out that the symbol of the plate or grail is found in many ancient cultures and beliefs. The first representations were found in ancient rock paintings and were associated with ancient rites related to gestation and birth. Jessie Weston (1850–1928), a scholar and folklorist who worked on medieval Arthurian texts, suggested that the lance and the cup were connected in a symbolic relationship in ancient oriental religions long before the institution of Christianity or the birth of Celtic tradition and that these could have provided a source of Grail material. In these religions, the phallus was a dominant symbol of their fertility cults but in some other cults, associated with death and birth, 'the most noticeable feature of the ritual was the prominence assigned to women' (Weston 1920, 44). It has therefore been suggested that the Grail procession might link back to Celtic initiation rites in which the Grail represents the feminine element and the lance the masculine and the blood representing life. Although today Arthurian scholars see Weston's ideas as 'ingenious speculation', her work is significant because it illustrates an important aspect of the field of Arthurian studies, namely that theories about the origin and meaning of Arthurian legend often spark the imagination of authors in their modern adaptations (Wood 1994, 115-16). Ordóñez believes that these observations are important for the mythical power that they assign to women and especially in this case where Díaz-Mas has been able to recuperate the masculine Arthurian intertext and rewrite it from a contemporary female perspective (Ordóñez 1991, 160).

4. The Subtitle

It must also be pointed out that the novel also has a subtitle, *El Caballero de la Verde Oliva*. This secondary title does not share a prominent position on the front cover of the book but instead quietly takes its place adjoined to the repetition of the main title

on the third page. When considering the function of the subtitle Genette explains that a secondary title will normally give a more literal indication of the theme that the main title of a book evokes symbolically or cryptically: in other words, sometimes, a subtitle can offer an essential explanation about the book and its premise. However, with this particular choice of subtitle, the potential reader is not allowed the luxury of such clarity. Indeed, the subtitle's potential for ironic interpretation is teasingly withheld until the reader enters well into the text. As has been discussed in the section on discursive communities, there will naturally be some readers who will simply interpret the meaning of the subtitle as the name given to a knight in the story. For others, the mental image of the olive tree may provide a conceptual link to the qualities of peace and wisdom symbolized in the legendary olive tree. Their intertextual journey to this 'signified' would be via Greek Classical literature and the ancient myth of Athena, who, in a contest with Poseidon won the prize of the city, which was later to bear her name, by wisely planting an olive tree that would grant the Athenians a source of food, energy and wood for its citizens in perpetuity.

If this intertextual connection is made it will determine whether irony will 'happen'⁵⁵ later on in the narrative development of *ERDSG*. The symbolic value of the 'sign' of the olive tree suggests the possibility that an alternative, more peaceful narrative could coexist within the text, in contrast to the suggestion of violence that has been offered as a possible connotation of the word 'el rapto'. This hope is embodied initially in the character of the 'Caballero de la Verde Oliva', otherwise known as Pelinor, a knight who truly believes that the discovery of the Holy Grail would usher in a new era of peace and be beneficial for Arthur and his kingdom. To reflect this, he chooses the green olive tree as his insignia. The irony of his choice of name is not revealed until the reader reaches the episode in which Lanzarote comes across an uncouth rustic labourer chopping down an olive tree with total disregard for its beauty in nature. After the labourer's instruction in the ways of chivalry by Lanzarote he too chooses as his name and insignia 'Caballero de la Verde Oliva'. It is at this point that irony's edge can once more be felt as the reader begins to feel uncomfortable at such an incongruous pairing of the ideals of peace and wisdom with the rough and belligerent rustic who is the complete antithesis of Pelinor.

⁵⁵ This is Hutcheon's preferred verb that best describes the ironic process (Hutcheon 1994, 5).

Conclusion

‘Reading ironically means, in complex ways, not taking things at their word; it means looking beyond standard use and exchange to what this or that might *really mean*’ (Colebrooke 2004, 4). This quote exemplifies most fittingly what Díaz-Mas hopes to achieve in the paratextual presentation of her work, namely, to sow the seed of a doubting and critical attitude on the part of readers, which will then help them determine how the rest of her text should be read. In this way, Díaz-Mas is allowed to speak the voice of feminism ironically in order to unleash its political force. Therefore, the publisher’s choice of illustration and the author’s choice of titles are not frivolous adornments, but act as a framework for Díaz-Mas’s labour, and provide valuable insight into the social, political and aesthetic principles that contextualise her book. As Hutcheon highlights, the game of irony is always a ‘risky business’ (Hutcheon 1994, 11), the reasons for which have already been elaborated, but when irony does work it can serve as a mark of intimacy between the author and reader.

As a final addition to this chapter on the influence of paratexts on the reading of *ERDSG* it should be pointed out that the novel was republished in 1993 in an edition for the Spanish mail-order book club, the ‘Círculo de lectores’.⁵⁶ In this new edition it appears in conjunction with another of Díaz-Mas’s works entitled *Nuestro milenio*.⁵⁷ This reprinting features a new front cover, which consists of an illustration of the painting *O Forzudo*⁵⁸ (1985) by the acclaimed Galician, female postmodern artist Menchu Lamas, and a preface written by the Spanish writer and journalist Ignacio Vidal-Folch in which he lauds the writing skills of Díaz-Mas and offers a resumé of the important themes with which the novel deals. Once again, the publishing house chose the illustration, as the editors of the book series wished to match up the works of authors with the works of painters of the same generation, a concept wholly approved by Díaz-Mas.⁵⁹ *O Forzudo* is a bold and colourful example of postmodern art, ambiguous and, therefore, open to many interpretations, depending on the gaze of the viewer. Menchu Lamas has stated that an artist cannot be a dictator but can

⁵⁶ Readers’ Circle.

⁵⁷ Our Millennium.

⁵⁸ The Strongman.

⁵⁹ Information provided by the author.

only give hints within a work as to how it should be received and appreciated (Gea 2014). This philosophy is a wholly postmodern one that links the creative experimental ideas of both artists and makes the choice of Lamas's oeuvre most suitable to promote *ERDSG* as a paradigm of the postmodern novel.

This image has been removed by the author for copyright reasons.

Illustration: *O Forzudo* (The Strongman) 1985 by Menchu Lamas. Museo de Bellas Artes, Álava, Spain.

Image available at
<https://www.google.com/search?biw=1440&bih=733&tbm=isch&sa=1&ei=eGLyXcCiG62PlwSv5KzwCg&q=El+Rapto+del+Santo+Grial+circulo+de+lectores&oq=El+Rapto+del+Santo+Grial+circulo+de+lectores>

Chapter 4: Historiographic Metafiction, Intertextuality and the Use of Textual/Structural and Discursive Irony in *El rapto del Santo Grial o El Caballero de la Verde Oliva*.

Introduction

In an interview, conducted in 2014 with Pedro M. Domene of the Spanish newspaper *Diario Córdoba*, Paloma Díaz-Mas discussed several characteristics of her work that she considered to be the hallmarks of her literature. Importantly, she highlighted the significance of parody and humour in her artistic output. Even in the most serious of her novels, there is an element of humour, she said, and this is achieved by the use of irony, which she defined as ‘la figura retórica que consiste en decir una cosa aparentando otra’.⁶⁰ Her novel *ERDSG* falls squarely into the category of a parodic text which, by definition, is a text that takes the form of a commentary upon another text or on literature in general: in this case, it is the genre of the Arthurian romance which is the target of the parody and the Grail legend, in particular, that is re-evaluated.

This chapter will highlight the instances and function of parody, and its close relation irony, at an **intertextual**, **textual/structural** and **discursive** level in *ERDSG*. Parody, as a literary technique, is inherently intertextual as it is a way of simultaneously communicating on different levels and, as such, is a perfect strategy for disguising opposition and dissent within a text. The chapter will illustrate how Paloma Díaz-Mas uses intertextual, structural and discursive irony to deconstruct and make critical comment on the revered legend of the Holy Grail, which is purportedly the vessel that Jesus Christ used at the Last Supper.⁶¹ However, there is no evidence that this vessel survived antiquity and the Bible makes no reference to it as a holy relic. To the contrary, it is a literary concept brought to the popular imagination by the Arthurian Grail romances over a thousand years later, which in Christian cultures has been handed down through history as a universal truth, acquiring the status of a ‘master

⁶⁰ A rhetorical trope that consists in saying one thing but meaning something else.

⁶¹ The Burgundian poet Robert de Boron was the first to identify the vessel of the Last Supper with the mysterious grail of Chrétien’s *Le Conte du Graal* and to describe how this vessel was used to collect the blood of Christ at the crucifixion by Joseph of Arimathea.

narrative'⁶² of Christian redemption. Its allure gave noble knights a higher meaning and purpose to their lives as its attainment promised the advent of peace and happiness on earth and a gateway to immortality. The devotion to a sacred object for which there is no existential proof and the artificiality of its ideological power is one of the targets for ridicule in *ERDSG*. Díaz-Mas uses comic irony to lay bare the concept of the Grail as a man-made construct and ask questions, which are equally relevant today, about the metaphorical grails that Man has created and continues to create in society. Such grails, whether they promise the key to eternal happiness, love or salvation exist solely to bring a sense of purpose to people's lives, because if Man has nothing to strive for then he becomes bored and disillusioned. For, it is in the chase that the greatest pleasure lies, not in the capture.

Another target for Díaz-Mas's comic irony is chivalric society itself. The code of chivalry taught the gentleman knight to put honour at the centre of his mental and social world and this life of honour had to be maintained, as it was through his honourable acts that the knight gained approbation, social standing and the affection of noblewomen (Keen 2005, 249). The classic virtues of the ideal knight were prowess, loyalty, generosity, courtesy, noble birth and honour and, according to the romances, Arthur and his knights generally lived according to these high standards. However, as Keen (2005, 190) reminds us, the goals of chivalrous societies were hardly idealistic: rather, they were based on legal and social status, wealth, privilege and bellicosity. It is this dark side of masculine chivalry, motivated by bloodshed and violence, wealth and power, and the need for adventure and impossible quests in order to give meaning to their knightly lives, that Paloma Díaz-Mas so keenly lampoons in *ERDSG*, enabling the reader to draw comparisons between the medieval setting and modernity and reflect on the fact that mankind's enduring relish for war has never gone away.

An important focus of the chapter will be the functioning of irony in language at **the site of discourse**. The notion of Mikhail Bakhtin's dialogic nature of language has

⁶² A master narrative (a term introduced by Jean-Francois Lyotard in *The Postmodern Condition* first published in 1979) refers to social theories or philosophies of history that claim to offer a comprehensive account of knowledge and experience and thus have a legitimated universal truth.

already been introduced in Chapter 3, so this chapter will build on this by illustrating examples of Paloma Díaz-Mas's use of double-coded language and assessing its ideological impact. At the lexical level, Díaz-Mas's comic use of *double entendre*⁶³ to create sexual innuendo and her frequent use of metaphorical language will be highlighted as rhetorical techniques which allow her to criticize chivalric values. The chapter will also offer a way of understanding the elements that work together within the text to make irony happen at **the level of discourse**. For this purpose, Linda Hutcheon's concept of the 'scene of irony' and 'irony's edge' will be employed. It will be shown that irony is a communicative and relational strategy as it operates not only between meanings at the level of semantics but also between people (Hutcheon 1994, 58). These are concepts that she has developed to show that irony is not simply an antiphrastic substitution of an ironic meaning (the unsaid) for its opposite, the literal meaning (or the said) (Hutcheon 1994, 12), but a much more complicated process that involves the intention of the author and the 'discursive communities' spoken of in Chapter 3. The examples of verbal irony chosen for analysis manifest that irony is a communicative process between the author and the reader and that the successful performance of irony relies heavily on a shared context between the ironist and the interpreter.

Also highlighted in the chapter is the question of intentionality, both on the part of the ironist and the interpreter. All irony happens intentionally, whether the attribution is made by the encoder or the decoder, and both parties are important players in this (Hutcheon 1994, 118). Interpreters of irony are not 'passive consumers' or 'receivers of irony' (Hutcheon 1994, 118) as they make irony happen by an intentional act, which depends on the interpreter's willingness to search for that intended meaning. This search requires that the interpreter oscillate rapidly between text and intertext, between the 'said' and the 'unsaid', which continually rub together to produce the spark which creates ironic meaning (Hutcheon 1994, 60). This constant mental activity of comparing and contrasting similarity and difference takes place both at a **structural and discourse level**. But the relationship between the 'said' and the 'unsaid' is not a relationship of equals. The power of the 'unsaid' to

63 An ambiguity of meaning arising from language that is often bawdy.

challenge the 'said' is the defining semantic condition of irony and is what gives irony its evaluative or critical edge (Hutcheon 1994, 60).

The final aim of the chapter will be to assess *ERDSG* as a work of **historiographic metafiction**, a term coined by Linda Hutcheon in her 1987 essay 'Beginning to theorize Postmodernism', and a concept she further developed in *A Poetics of Postmodernism* (2000). According to Hutcheon, the distinctive features of this narrative form are: intertextuality, the ironic distancing of the author, self-reflexive metafiction, the creative use of humour, and a persistent use of parodic dialogue with the past, which is loaded with ideological implications to question linguistic and literary conventions (Hutcheon 2000b, 105-123). Hutcheon sees historiographic metafiction as a way to rewrite history in postmodern fiction that is distinct from the way that history is written about in traditional historical fiction. The distinction referred to is that historiographic metafiction incorporates a theoretical self-awareness of both history and fiction as human constructs and as such the metafictional narrative may be used to rethink and rework the past (Hutcheon 2000b, 5). In *ERDSG* Díaz-Mas stands back as an author to question and debunk the mythical portrayal passed down in Arthurian literature of the Grail knights 'as ideal and lofty beings' (Ordóñez, 1991, 151) and to expose their chivalric values as masculine, martial ones, whilst her reworking offers a more desirable and female alternative text. An appraisal of *ERDSG* as a work of historiographic metafiction will follow the textual analysis of the novel.

1. The Textual Analysis

ERDSG is unashamedly a mosaic of other texts. Many of the texts alluded to are medieval Spanish ballads, which include 'El romance de la doncella guerrera',⁶⁴ 'El romance de la infantina encantada',⁶⁵ 'El romance de una fatal ocasión',⁶⁶ 'El romance de Blancaniña',⁶⁷ (also known as 'Albaniña',⁶⁸ 'La adúltera'⁶⁹ or 'La casada infiel'⁷⁰), 'El

64 The Ballad of the Warrior Maiden.

65 The Ballad of the Enchanted Princess

66 The Ballad of a Fatal Occasion. Translation provided by Ordóñez (1991, 161).

67 The Ballad of the White Maiden.

68 The White Maiden.

romance del Conde Niño',⁷¹ and 'El romance del Conde Arnaldos'.⁷² Further intertextual connections are to be found with the Spanish medieval legend of 'La leyenda de las cien doncellas',⁷³ the Judeo-Sephardic poem 'El paipero'⁷⁴ and the poem 'Yo voy soñando caminos de la tarde'⁷⁵ by the Spanish poet Antonio Machado (1875-1939). The chapter entitled 'El Caballero de la Choza de Tristura'⁷⁶ relates intertextually with the hermit episode from the Arthurian romance *Yvain* and the character Gauvain with his namesake from the Arthurian Vulgate. The almost verbatim insertion of the Arnaldos romance into the narrative, the allusion to Machado's poem, the hermit episode and Gauvain's soliloquy function to interrogate and ridicule chivalric values such as the knights' stubborn adherence to the chivalric code of honour and obedience and the ludicrous demands of the practice of Courtly Love. The many allusions to Spanish medieval ballads give Paloma Díaz-Mas a platform to raise questions about women, power and gender by ironically subverting the moral message of the original medieval texts, which then opens up her text to create new ideas and new possible readings. The Spanish ballad is a genre in which women could express points of view and ideologies that were intrinsically feminine (Gómez Acuña 2002, 184), although, as this chapter will demonstrate, the message of the tales was not always strictly feminist. The discussions of these intertexts will demonstrate that intertextuality in *ERDSG* involves much more than just the coming together of texts, but the conscious placement of these allusions by the author, designed to influence or manipulate how the reader engages with her text.

1. 2 The Feminine Voice in the Spanish Ballad

The Spanish ballads were oral tales, traditionally accompanied by music to make them easier to remember. They have remained in the Spanish popular imagination because they transmitted sentiments that were familiar and meaningful to people's

69 The Adulteress.

70 The Unfaithful Wife.

71 The Ballad of the Young Count.

72 The Ballad of Count Arnaldos.

73 The Tribute of the One Hundred Maidens.

74 Known more commonly as 'Pai Pero' (Brother Peter).

75 I go dreaming down roadways of an evening. (Translated by Trueblood, cited in Machado, 2003, 79).

76 The Knight of the Hut of Sadness.

lives. As each ballad exhibits an underlying formulaic structure, this has allowed the ballad to adapt not only to the differing cultures of the autonomous regions of Spain but also to different countries around the world (Díaz 1994). The singing of ballads helped to while away the monotony of daily tasks and was performed to accompany important life events such as the celebration of 'high days and holidays and to accompany courtship and carnival' (Masera 2011, 41). Some ballads were associated with rural activities such as the sowing and harvesting of crops. In Castile, the songs sung by women whilst sowing were known as 'mayas'⁷⁷ because sowing took place in May, whilst those sung at harvest were known as 'canciones de siega y espadaña'.⁷⁸ For peasant women, the ballad was a welcome vehicle for expressing their dissatisfactions in life under the restrictions of medieval patriarchal society.

Many of the old ballads were implicitly subversive of traditional male authority in Spanish society and often contained a strong feminist viewpoint on a whole range of human emotions, such as love, sex, grief, fear, honour and duty (Wright 2004, 172). In the ballads sung by women, there was a tendency to portray an inverted world where women and men acted in opposition to their traditional gender roles. For example, women would not normally dare to speak in front of men about their sexual fantasies but were able to do this in the ballad. Masera (2011, 49-53) highlights that in many ballads, the symbols of the moon (especially moonrise and dawn), the wind, the trees and water are associated with women's erotic desires and the frequent occurrence of such symbols enables their identification as women's songs. The river and the olive grove are the most erotic places for lovers to meet and the motif of crossing the river is a symbol 'linked to the renewal of sexual vigour, the affirmation of coitus, and the promise of fertility' (De Lope, as cited in Masera 2011, 52). The following extract demonstrates this erotic symbolism:

Por el río me llevad, amigo,
y llevádeme [sic] por el río.⁷⁹ (NC 462)⁸⁰

⁷⁷ May songs.

⁷⁸ Harvest songs.

⁷⁹ Take me down to the river, lover,
and take me down to the river.

(Translated by Masera, cited in Xon de Ros and Geraldine Hazbun, 2011, 47).

Salga la luna, el caballero,
Salga la luna, y vámonos luego.⁸¹ (NC 459)

Gómez Acuña (2002, 185) suggests that the different endings that tend to be a feature of many Spanish ballads may be a clue as to whether it is a male or female-voiced ballad. For example, 'La bastarda y el segador'⁸² was traditionally sung during harvest time in Spain and tells of the alleged daughter of a nobleman who has sexual relations with a harvester. As the ballad begins, the girl is secluded in her house (or sometimes in a convent) and spies the harvester through a window. She invites him to harvest her barley, symbolic of her sexuality and then compensates him economically for his sexual favours. Gómez Acuña concludes that the versions that end with the harvester's death at the hands of the seductive lady are usually sung by men, whereas the bawdy versions, which do not pose a life-threatening situation for the man and where the woman is in sexual control, are usually sung by women. From this she extrapolates that the stories that end with the death of the harvester are an attempt to pass on a symbolic moral message, which represents men's distrust of women and the belief that if men die women will not be able to rule society (Gómez Acuña 2002, 185).

2. The Intertexts

2. 1 'La leyenda de las cien doncellas'

ERDSG's story opens with an aging and weary King Arthur who convenes his knights to tell them that a hundred weaver maidens, previously held captive in the Castle of Pésima Aventura⁸³ and led by a certain Blancaniña, were now in possession of the

80 All lyric quotations are taken from Frenk (2003) *Nuevo corpus de la antigua lírica popular hispánica (siglos XV a XVII)*, cited in Xon de Ros and Geraldine Hazbun, 2011, 47).

81 As soon as the moon comes out, my lover,
as soon as the moon comes out, let us go.

(Translated by Masera, cited in Xon de Ros and Geraldine Hazbun, 2011, 50).

82 The Illegitimate Daughter and the Reaper.

83 The Castle of Ill Fortune.

Holy Grail and were keeping it safe in the Castle of Acabarás⁸⁴ whilst awaiting the Knights of the Round Table to come and collect it. This causes great consternation amongst the knights, for, as King Arthur explained, this would mean an end to their adventures and return them to an empty existence with nothing in life left to strive for, hence the irony of the name of the castle where the Holy Grail was to be collected. The case of the hundred incarcerated maidens makes an intertextual connection with the mythical legend (often taken as historical) known as the 'Leyenda de las cien doncellas'. During the Muslim conquest of Iberia, history reveals that Christian women's bodies became weapons of propaganda as the invaders sought to consolidate their domination and authority. The sexual dominance over Christian women, whether by intermarrying or enslavement, was considered symbolic of military success and a humiliating reminder to the Christians that they were a conquered nation (Barton 2015, 39-44). The legend tells of a yearly payment of one hundred beautiful Christian maidens, fifty from the Spanish nobility and fifty from the common people, which was made to the Muslim conquerors of Iberia in exchange for a temporary agreement, allegedly by King Mauregato,⁸⁵ to maintain peace between the Astur-Leonese kingdom and Al-Andalus. The first mention of this shameful tribute came from Cardinal Pedro Marcio, writing in Santiago de Compostela sometime between 1158 and 1174, who copied out a reference to the event from what he claimed to be an original charter of King Ramiro I of Asturias, thought to have been issued in May 844.⁸⁶ The tribute was finally brought to an end when the Christian King Ramiro I defeated the Muslim army of Abd-al-Rahman II in the Battle of Clavijo (a town in the present-day region of La Rioja) in 844 AD. On the first day of battle, it is said that Ramiro and his troops were on the brink of defeat but the King had a dream in which the Apostle James visited him and told him to keep fighting, resulting in the aforementioned Christian victory (Barton 2015, 82-3). The legend of the incarceration of these helpless Christian maidens, used as objects of exchange to buy peace between the warring kingdoms, was used as a message of warning and

84 The meaning of the Spanish word 'acabarás' is 'you will finish' which sends out a strong comic and ironic message that at this place the search for the Holy Grail will end, thus signalling the demise of the world of adventure and warfare so beloved by the Arthurian knights.

85 King of Asturias between 783 and 788.

86 Barton (2015, 91) suggests that the Compostelan forger of the legend may have been influenced by the theme of human tribute, which crops up in Greek mythology for instance in the legend of Theseus and the Minotaur.

inspiration to the Christian community (Barton 2015, 88). Allegedly, the shame attached to the tribute eventually brought Christian men to their senses and emboldened them to fight for their women's honour and for that of the whole of Christendom. The legend is one of Spain's most cherished myths passing into poetry, literature and theatre throughout the centuries as it has been portrayed as a key moment in the progress of the Christian Reconquista of Muslim Iberia and the forging of the new Spanish nation. As Barton mentions, even to this day, on the 5th of October, the feast day of St. Froilán, the victory is celebrated in a festival called *Las cantaderas*⁸⁷ by the inhabitants of León.

The theme of female imprisonment, ransom and damsels in distress is popular in medieval romance. The 'Legend of the One Hundred Maidens' also resounds intertextually with the plot of another 12th century romance by Chrétien de Troyes entitled *Yvain* in which three hundred female silk workers are incarcerated in the castle of 'Pesmé Aventure'⁸⁸ and forced to work in intolerable conditions under the command of two brothers, the demon sons of a woman and an incubus. The maidens' imprisonment had come about because many years ago the lord of their land had unwittingly strayed into the brothers' territory, so in exchange for not having to fight them in battle he made a pact that each year he would send them a tribute of thirty maidens from his land. Therefore, in the early stages of the plot of *ERDSG*, enhanced and reinforced by its intertexts, the reader is presented with a stereotypical image of medieval women as weak and forlorn creatures living their lives at the mercy of men. However, the denouement of *ERDSG* reveals that the Grail maidens are not vulnerable women in need of rescue: in fact, they are not even being guarded at the castle. In a complete and **ironic structural subversion** of the medieval legend and the romance, the *ERDSG* maidens emerge as women who are in control of their situation and destiny. The possession of the Holy Grail enables *ERDSG*'s maidens to subvert the balance of power from masculine to feminine by using it, as a bargaining tool to fulfil their sexual desires. The positioning of the two opposing representations of the captive maidens (one at the beginning and the other at the end of the novel) is characteristic of how Díaz-Mas uses irony **structurally** throughout *ERDSG*: every

87 The Singers.

88 The French *Pesmé Aventure* (*Pésima Aventura* in Spanish) also translates as 'The Castle of Ill Fortune'.

episode, every character is reflected back on itself with an ironic interpretation. The ironic subversion of the medieval legend, in which medieval Christian identity and power are linked to the sexual purity and honour of its women, is complete when the reader learns that the maidens of the Castle of Acabarás voluntarily sail off to Turkey, a Muslim country, and the land of the Infidel (the land of their captors in the original legend) so that they can all marry the rustic ‘Caballero de la Verde Oliva’.

2. 2 **‘El romance de la doncella guerrera’**

As Hutcheon (1994, 11) has indicated, there have to be certain markers in a text that act as literary clues and start readers on their intertextual journey. In *ERDSG* one such journey is triggered by the following utterance: ‘Había allí un caballero muy anciano...tenía este caballero siete hijas jóvenes, mas no le había dado Dios ningún hijo’⁸⁹ (Díaz-Mas 1984, 13). A similar scenario marks the beginning of the medieval romance ‘La doncella guerrera’, which tells the tale of the youngest daughter of an elderly nobleman who is dishonoured because he has no son to send off to fight in the war between France and Aragon. Like the young maiden in *ERDSG*, who takes as her knightly name ‘El Caballero de Morado’, this daughter eagerly steps in to defend her father’s honour by offering to disguise herself as a man and go off to fight. This she does for several years until a knight or prince discovers her true sex. In some of the truncated forms of the ballad, this occurs whilst the maiden is in combat with the knight and her helmet falls off, revealing her golden tresses. In longer versions, the revelation of her identity is more gradual. The male knight is attracted by the beauty of the female knight’s eyes and begins to suspect her sex. On his mother’s advice, he then subjects the cross-dressed warrior to several tests to try and confirm his suspicions. When the maiden is finally invited to bathe with him at the river she knows her ruse has come to an end and makes an excuse to return to her father’s house. The ballad, in its many versions, invariably has a happy and traditional ending, as the knight falls in love with the maiden and marriage ensues. The ironic function of the allusion to this intertext becomes apparent later in the novel as the reader shares in the events of the tragic demise of ‘El Caballero de Morado’.

89 There once lived a very old knight... this knight had seven young daughters, but God had not given him even one son.

The dialogue that takes place between King Arthur and 'El Caballero de Morado' in the opening scene provides an excellent example of Paloma Díaz-Mas's techniques of creating the 'scene of irony' at the **discursive level** (Hutcheon 1994, 1). After making a spirited argument that she should be allowed to join the quest for the Grail, King Arthur finally accedes to the maiden's wish, but on the stipulation that she first prove her prowess with the sword. Arthur's words: 'Te armaré caballero si eres capaz de meter mi espada en tu vaina'⁹⁰ (Díaz-Mas 1984, 15) could, of course, be taken literally by some readers, and Hutcheon's theory reminds us that this possibility is indeed one of the conditions of an ironic statement (Hutcheon 1994, 10). Presumably, to sheath a sword, especially one as large and grand as King Arthur's, would involve a great deal of skill and thus be regarded as proof of the ability to bear arms. The Spanish word 'vaina' means 'scabbard or sheath', or more generally, a structure that envelops another. However, the reader who is familiar with the etymology of the word will know that it derives from the Latin for 'vagina', which suggests that King Arthur's test of military prowess could also be taken as a sexual proposition. If the reader continues in this vein of thought then King Arthur's statement: 'Gran placer me has proporcionado'⁹¹ (Díaz-Mas 1984, 15) may take on the character of yet another sexual innuendo.

The following utterance by the King may also be read at the dialogic level, illustrating yet another example of **discursive irony**: 'Pero júrame que es la primera espada que tocas y que jamás antes envainaste ninguna otra. He de ver si te heriste o no con ella y si brotó sangre cuando la metiste en tu vaina'⁹² (Díaz-Mas 1984, 16). A trace of blood on the young maiden's shirt might have been the proof needed by the King to reassure him of her lack of expertise in the handling of arms and of the likelihood of failure on the Grail quest. However, the more sinister 'unsaid' significance of his vocabulary may suggest to the reader that this drop of blood is a sign that the maiden has had to surrender her virginity to Arthur in exchange for the opportunity to take part in the search. At this point, an awareness of the context of the medieval Grail story is needed for the true irony of the situation to be released. According to the

⁹⁰ I will make you a knight if you are able to put my sword into your scabbard.

⁹¹ You have given me great pleasure.

⁹² But swear to me that this is the first sword you have touched and that you have never sheathed any other. I have to see whether or not you wounded yourself with it and if it broke blood when you put it in your scabbard.

legend, only a pure and chaste knight will achieve the Grail (a feat accomplished by Galahad in later versions of the story). By robbing 'El Caballero de Morado' of her virginity, Arthur has taken away her state of purity, ensuring that her quest is doomed from the start. At this juncture, the effect of 'irony's edge' (Hutcheon 1994, 4) begins to grate, as the reader cannot help but make a critical judgement in feeling disgust for King Arthur's actions, and compassion for the plight of 'El Caballero de Morado'.

The emotional effects of 'irony's edge' become even more acute as the reader discovers the would-be female knight's choice of knightly colours and insignia. Bellver (1996, 150) points out that the colour purple makes a strongly ironic **intertextual** connection to the theme of feminism, as it was the colour chosen by the Spanish feminist movement to symbolise their struggle for equality. As her insignia the maiden chooses the image of a fist clenched over the pommel of a sword, an emblem of 20th century radical feminism. As if to double the impact of this emblem, the reader learns that it is portrayed inside the mirror of Venus, the Roman Goddess of Love and Beauty, motherhood and prosperity and another potent symbol of femininity. Some readers might also make the intertextual connection between the clenched fist and sword and 'the arm clothed in white samite',⁹³ which rose from the lake to present King Arthur with the sword Excalibur, and later, to return it to the deep when Arthur is at the point of death. According to the legend, this was the arm of the Lady of the Lake, whose origins as a water deity, representing the essential essence of life itself, may be traced back to Celtic society. Once these intertextual connections have been made, the irony and poignancy of the image of 'El Caballero de Morado' setting out on her quest, symbolically laden with so many emblems of feminism, is heightened for the reader. The image, simultaneously amusing and full of pathos, evokes sympathy and admiration for the courage and idealism of one who has already become a victim of King Arthur's patriarchal society.

The story of 'El Caballero de Morado' is a very close imitation of that of the 'doncella' in the ballad, but it is an imitation with critical difference, which Hutcheon stresses is

⁹³ The reference to 'the arm clothed in white samite' is found in many Arthurian texts, such as Sir Thomas Malory's *Morte d'Arthur* (c. 1470).

a salient feature of parody (Hutcheon 1994, 4). At the beginning of their quests, both female knights, in their bid to prove themselves capable of defending the honour of their families and augmenting their own in the process, are prepared to negate the outward biological signs of their gender by concealing them beneath the very masculine symbol of body armour. In doing so, they symbolically profess their willingness to submit themselves to the terms of the male chivalric honour code. However, the maiden of the ballad's foray into the masculine world of adventures and violence could never have the character of a true feminist challenge. As the protagonist of a medieval romance, most likely written by a man, her actions were dictated by a male-dominated society and had to be an example of the high standards of behaviour expected of women in the medieval world. In her own words, the 'doncella' admits that she feels like a traitor to her sex, and the fact that she adopts the name of her father, Don Martín, as part of her disguise, suggests that she is never able to shake off the effects of paternal influence. From an initial show of activity and defiance, the 'doncella' willingly moves back to a passive existence in the traditional setting of the home, as she calls to her father: 'Abra las puertas, mi padre, ábralas de par en par. // Madre, sáqueme la rueca que traigo ganas de hilar'.⁹⁴ Her virginity and honour intact, and in the knowledge that her suitor will follow her, the enclosed patriarchal space of her father's house is where she can become a woman again (Iturriaga 2008). This is where she will once more take her place at the spinning wheel, that powerful metaphor for maternity, attachment to the home and chaste industriousness (Jones and Stallybrass 2000, 89).

In comparison, the quest of 'El Caballero de Morado' offers no hint of the feeling of a betrayal of the female gender; in fact, it is an attempt to celebrate it, as demonstrated by the outward show of so much feminist symbolism. Unlike her counterpart, she does not appropriate the name of her father as her knightly name, but when pressed by Pelinor in the death scene, takes the symbolic step of renaming herself Saint Agatha. This would appear to be an **ironic intertextual** link introduced here by Díaz-

94 'Open the doors, father, open them wide.

Mother, fetch me the spinning wheel for I wish to spin'.

The full text of the romance can be found in the collection *Flor nueva de romances viejos* (1928) by Ramón Menéndez Pidal.

<https://www.publicconsulting.com/wordpress/flornueva/>

Mas and an incongruous choice of namesake for a feminist, given that in the act of martyrdom, Agatha's breasts, the ultimate symbols of motherhood and a woman's femininity, were cut off by Roman soldiers. However, a more modern intertext should also be familiar to Spanish readers. Saint Agatha is the patron saint of the Spanish town of Zamarramala (in Segovia) where annually, on her Saint's day, the women take over the running of the town and symbolically burn a straw effigy of a man in an exhibition of feminine power (Macklin 2010, 190). Díaz-Mas appears to play with the idea of Saint Agatha as an ambiguous symbol, at once representing feminine vulnerability and at the same time feminine power, which hints at a positive theme of feminine resistance that is developed at the end of the novel. Ironically, none of these symbols of feminism is enough to protect 'El Caballero de Morado' from masculine violence (Bellver 1996). The female knight's encounter in the woods with Pelinor, a case of **structural dramatic irony** that leads to her demise, provides another opportunity for an ironic reading of the narrative. 'El Caballero de Morado' loses the physical fight because she has no lance, the most powerful and symbolic weapon of strength in medieval armoury. The ironic metaphor of the lance as the phallus and a sign of power and authority becomes clear and is a poignant reminder of the maiden's lack of power in the face of masculine society.

In a desperate attempt to prevent Pelinor from killing her, 'El Caballero de Morado' begins to sing the romance of 'La doncella guerrera', in the hope that Pelinor will decode the ballad, realize the similarities to her story, and recognize her. This proves to be another potent example of 'irony's edge', where the reader, from the privileged position of knowing what has gone before in the narrative, may experience the emotions of incredulity, irritation or even anger at Pelinor's stupidity at not being able to recognize the parallels between the stories. It is at such points that Díaz-Mas enters into what she calls a 'juego de complicidades con el lector'⁹⁵ (Cornejo-Parriego 1997, 481).

Even to her last breath 'El Caballero de Morado' puts up a valiant struggle to save herself, not only physically, but also through discourse. She remains stalwart in her efforts to stay faithful to the codes of chivalry, but also to her need to express herself

⁹⁵ A game of collusion with the reader.

on her own terms, and in a discourse familiar to her as a woman. However, for Pelinor, her narrative is nothing but an old wives' story and he is unable to decipher the implications of the tale. As Ordóñez points out, a happy resolution to the situation is impossible because of the irremediable clash of male and female discourses in which men are typically 'deaf to conciliatory voices and narratives'...[and] 'blindly destructive of values different from their own' (Ordóñez 1991,156).

In her description of the last moments of 'El Caballero de Morado', Díaz-Mas again returns to the sexual imagery of the sword, the sheath and the drops of menstrual blood. As Pelinor embeds his sword up to the hilt into the 'vientre' or 'abdomen' of his sweetheart, the reader may be alerted to another possible 'signified' of the Spanish word 'vientre' as meaning 'womb'. An appreciation of this semantic connection confers an even more ironic symbolism upon the death of the maiden warrior, for, like her adopted namesake, Saint Agatha, she has suffered violation in a part of her body which most symbolises her womanhood. The comparison of the ease with which Pelinor's sword enters her body with the effortless entry of the sword into the sheath, once again, may be interpreted as a metaphorical rape: but this time the maiden sheds no blood, as the King had already taken away her virginity. As a spoil of war Pelinor robs the young maiden of her scabbard, the metaphorical vagina, and does not even bother to remove her helmet after he slits her throat. Pelinor's attitude is so despicable that it deserves the intervention of the narrator as manifest in the following ironic understatement: 'En verdad obró muy mal en esto'⁹⁶ (Díaz-Mas 1984, 63).

On finding the corpse of 'El Caballero de Morado' the knight Gauvain's monologue of lament is a triumph of medieval misogyny. His language and imagery clearly express his opinion of the subservient place that women hold in medieval society: they should act as the sheath for the man's sword and the quiver for his arrow (Díaz-Mas 1984, 81). Yet, more sinister and ominous is his utterance: '¡Ah, dulcísima doncella, que en todo quisiste emular a los varones. No está el mundo hecho para estas cosas ni las mujeres podrán entrar en liza como iguales de los hombres mientras éstos posean

⁹⁶ In truth he acted very badly in this situation.

lanza o espada'⁹⁷ (Díaz-Mas 1984, 81), as this resonates ironically with the struggle that women have historically experienced in their attempt to achieve equality with men. As readers digest the prophetic quality of these words and their pertinence to contemporary society they may once again feel the uneasiness of 'irony's edge' in recognising that the world is still an unjust place.

2. 3 'El romance de la infantina encantada'

Lancelot's quest for the Grail takes him through the forest, which is where he comes upon a rustic bumpkin who is in the process of chopping down an olive tree. In contrast to his rough demeanour, the rustic is singing a sweet song about a young maiden with golden hair, who sits amidst the silver branches of a golden oak tree. This piece of information gives the reader three intertextual clues that evoke a medieval romance entitled *La infantina encantada*:

...el tronco tenía de oro, las ramas de plata fina.
En el pimpollo más alto, viera estar una infantina,
con peine de oro en sus manos, que los cabellos partía ⁹⁸

According to the ballad, a knight on his journey comes across the 'infantina', who says she has been enchanted by fairies and begs him to break the spell with a kiss and take her hand in marriage. The knight does not accept her offer outright, saying that he first has to go and consult his elderly mother on what his course of action should be. The knight receives a positive response from his mother but when he returns the beautiful siren has gone, carried off by her father and seven brothers (Riquer 2011). This scenario, in which a young man misses an important opportunity because of his failure in his decision-making, makes an intertextual connection to Chrétien de Troyes' romance *Le Conte du Graal*. In Díaz-Mas's hands, the episode in *ERDSG* is written as an **ironic intertextual** inversion of the first encounter between Perceval,

⁹⁷ Ah, sweet maiden, who tried to emulate men in every way! The world is neither made for such things nor will women be able to fight like men as long as men possess the lance or the sword.

⁹⁸ The trunk was golden and the branches of fine silver.

On the highest shoot could be seen a princess,

And in her hands a golden comb, with which she combed her hair.

the naïve young boy of the forest, with a band of Arthur's knights. The barrage of questions which takes place between Lancelot and the rustic is humorously and pointedly linked to Perceval's failure to ask questions in his quest for the Holy Grail, as the narrator of *ERDSG* states: 'En aquel tiempo los caballeros solían preguntar por todo lo que veían, pues ninguno ignoraba que el valeroso Perceval quedó deshonrado por no preguntar cuando debía'⁹⁹ (Díaz-Mas 1984, 32). This episode constitutes a prime example of **intertextual and structural irony** in the novel. Firstly, because the rustic, who is caught in the senseless act of chopping down an olive tree, takes as his knightly name 'El Caballero de la Verde Oliva', with the olive tree as his insignia and green as his colour. The olive tree, as we know, is an ancient symbol of peace and wisdom, neither of which qualities he possesses. This turns out to be a double irony, as the reader will already know that Pelinor, who had been appointed by Arthur to obstruct the other knights on the quest, is also riding under this identity.

The episode between Lancelot and the woodsman illustrates another case of irony at **the site of discourse** where 'opposing conceptions produce a humorous misunderstanding' (Bellver 1996, 151). The insightful comments of the woodsman, who is totally ignorant about chivalric society, its codes of conduct and traditional knightly trappings, comically demystifies the symbolic knightly paraphernalia which Lancelot wears, by reducing it to just a pile of everyday objects: indeed, what else is an ensign if not in reality a piece of cloth? The interchange of this comic clash of discourses also highlights the class difference between the two men and enables Díaz-Mas to reveal a further undesirable aspect of chivalric behaviour, namely its elitism. As these words of Lancelot show: '¡Mucho me enojaría morir como un villano!'¹⁰⁰ (Díaz-Mas 1984, 36), the honour code of chivalry even determined how a knight should meet his death. A death met by the strike of an axe or the blow of a dagger would be an unacceptable and inferior class of death, suitable only for the low classes. In the final chapters of *ERDSG* the weapon of irreverent humour and laughter, generated by irony, are used to their greatest effect. In the hands of the Grail maidens, that most sought after and revered of holy artefacts, the Holy Grail, is reduced to the

⁹⁹ In those days the knights used to enquire about everything they saw, as everyone knew that the valiant Perceval was dishonoured because he did not ask, when he should have.

¹⁰⁰ I would be very cross to die like a villain.

status of a prize given in exchange for the rustic knight's sexual favours. This counter text is a complete subversion of the knight Perceval's mysterious encounter with the Grail at the Grail castle and also subverts the spiritual and religious connections of the Grail introduced by Robert de Boron in his *Le Roman de l'estoire dou Graal* (c.1190). However, in spite of the many humorous overtones that the demythologization and desacrilization of such a hallowed object bring, this particular ironic inversion could lead to a varying number of evaluative responses from the reader. One has to accept that for some, perhaps of a religious persuasion, the effect of 'irony's edge' would not be to provoke laughter but rather a sense of unease at the sacrilegious overtones of the ironic connection being made. A case in point of irony being 'a risky business', as often commented by Hutcheon.

2. 4 'El romance de una fatal ocasión'

On an intertextual level, the name of the senior Grail maiden, Blancaniña, as well as evoking the character of Blancheflor in Chrétien's romance of the Grail, is one that should resonate with a Spanish readership, possibly at two levels. Firstly, with the young maiden addressed as 'blanca niña' in the ballad known as 'El romance de una fatal ocasión' and secondly with the Blancaniña of 'El romance de Blancaniña'. In the first of these romances, a knight interrupts a young maiden as she walks through the meadow. Believing she was alone, the maiden had hitched up her petticoats to reveal her undergarments to experience the cooling effects of the dewy grass on her body. The knight is overcome by her beauty, and, taking advantage of the situation, attempts to rape the young girl at the foot of an olive tree. In medieval times the integrity of a woman's honour was the benchmark by which she was judged by society and once lost, her status could rarely be recovered. Thus, in the ballad, the maiden strives to preserve her virginity and manages to grab the knight's sword with which she kills him. With his dying breath, the knight offers no words of apology for his abominable behaviour but instead entreats the maiden to tell nobody about the ignominious manner of his death by his own sword. The choice of the name Blancaniña for the spokesperson of the Grail maidens appears to be an intentionally ironic act on the part of Díaz-Mas as the Blancaniña of *ERDSG* is anything but morally pure, as her name suggests, presenting the reader with another example of

intertextual irony. As the reader oscillates back and fore between the modern text and the medieval ballad the sexual morality of the medieval Blancaniña contrasts markedly with the promiscuity of the Blancaniña of *ERDSG* as she and her companions entice, welcome and positively encourage their ‘Caballero de la Verde Oliva’ to indulge their sexual desires, cancelling out the medieval ballad’s patriarchal, moral lesson.

2. 5 ‘El romance de Blancaniña’ (also known as ‘Albaniña’, ‘La adúltera’ or ‘La casada infiel’)

The ballad entitled ‘Blancaniña’ or ‘La adúltera’ presents a very different young woman from the Blancañina of ‘El romance de una fatal ocasión’. This maiden has much more in common with the Blancaniña of our modern retelling. In this romance, a young wife is at home alone while her husband is away hunting. A young man passes by her balcony and she invites him up to her room to share her bed. In this ballad, a ‘carnavalesque’ inversion of gender roles is evident, as the female protagonist becomes the seducer and dominates the situation. When her husband unexpectedly returns home Blancañina has to skilfully ward off his questions as he begins to spot the tell-tale signs of her illicit dalliance. For example, she explains that the horse tied up in the courtyard is a gift from her father, and so on and so on, with each excuse becoming more inventive than the last. Although some of the many endings to this ballad are tragic, with Blancaniña being beaten by her husband or taking her own life, the comic versions of the ballad offer a more positive outcome from a female point of view as they end in a linguistic and personal triumph for the young maiden (Insuela 1986).

The arrival of the rustic ‘Caballero de la Verde Oliva’ at the Castle of Acabarás offers another example of where **discursive irony** comes to the fore and heralds a different tone to the feminine discourse as evidenced in the first part of *ERDSG*. The dialogue that ensues between Blancaniña, the Grail maidens’ spokesperson, and the rustic knight, is saturated with sexual innuendo. The Grail maidens, apparently innocent about the trappings of chivalry, are unable to identify the large object carried by the knight as being a lance, and so admiring it from afar, excitedly ask one another about

the purpose of: ‘aquella reluciente y enorme verga que llevaba el caballero desconocido, pues nunca habían visto otra igual ni sabían cuál era su utilidad’¹⁰¹ (Díaz-Mas, 1984, 72). In Spanish, the word ‘verga’ means both rod and phallus, but the reader also knows that in this context the word is being used to describe the rustic knight’s lance, thus making the sexual connection. The maidens’ ‘instant fascination with the knight’s “lanza tan inhiesta”¹⁰² restores to the text woman’s role as an active sexual subject’, and in turn, the knight’s attraction towards the bejewelled Grail, ‘whose “brillo y resplandor”¹⁰³ seems “más vivo que el de la punta de... [su] lanza”¹⁰⁴ creates a sense of balance in this game of sexual admiration as well as a sense of shared sexual pleasure’ (Levine 1993, 194). Blancaniña even offers to give the rustic the Holy Grail as a prize in exchange for the opportunity of taking hold of his lance: ‘Pero a ti te lo daré como premio si me enseñas cómo embrazar tu lanza’¹⁰⁵ (Díaz-Mas, 1984, 74). It is at this point that the lance is metaphorically emasculated as a symbol of war, male aggression and phallic domination and claimed instead as a source of female satisfaction (Ordóñez 1991, 160).

A heightened sense of sexual energy certainly permeates the pages of the final section of *ERDSG* as the rustic ‘Caballero de la Verde Oliva’ undertakes the quest to put his ‘poderosa lanza’¹⁰⁶ (Díaz-Mas 1984, 71) in the ‘service’ of every maiden at the Grail Castle, with the result that they all become pregnant. Constituting an amusing ironic reversal of the Grail topic of enchanted maidens, this example of **structural irony** brings about the realisation of the ironic value of the final betrayal by the rustic ‘Caballero de la Verde Oliva’ of his chosen chivalric name and insignia, which as we remember, embodies the values of wisdom, patience and civilization. At the end of the novel, this knight shows none of these qualities and the only thing he now symbolizes is greed and fecundity. Unfortunately, there is no room for the knight’s harem of sexually liberated and pregnant females in the Christian kingdom of Arthur so they decide to set off for Turkey. Díaz-Mas’s final twist of **structural irony** comes with the

101 that enormous gleaming rod that the unknown knight bore, as they had never seen anything like it and didn’t know what it was used for.

102 Such an erect lance.

103 Sheen and brightness.

104 More vivid than the tip of [his] lance.

105 But I will give it to you as a prize if you show me how to grab your lance.

106 Powerful lance.

ignominy of the Grail being absent-mindedly forgotten about and buried amidst sacks of flour, while the knight and the 'liberated' maidens set off to a heathen land possibly in the hope that they will find the 'sensual pleasures of the East' awaiting them there (Ordóñez 1991, 162).

2. 6 'El paipero'

The welcoming scene of the rustic 'El Caballero de la Verde Oliva' at the Grail Castle is reminiscent of the popular Judeo-Spanish romance 'El paipero'.¹⁰⁷ This ballad is traditionally sung by women as a wedding song and is a prime example of bawdy humour. In the ballad, Fray Pedro or Brother Peter, the quintessential lascivious priest, is sitting in the sun with his 'rope' dangling from under his robes. The ladies, presumably nuns, who have been observing him, ask what 'it' is. He tells them that it is his hunting gun, along with the bullets for ammunition. Like the rustic in *ERDSG*, the priest is invited to join the 'ladies' upstairs where they wash him with rosewater and weigh his male member on golden scales. He impregnates all one hundred and twenty of them, all of whom give birth to girls, except for the cook (Cohen 1984). The erotic ballad is considered to be an anticlerical satire designed to ridicule the Christian clergy who oppressed the Jews and expelled them from Spain (Anahory-Librowicz 1992).

2. 7 'El romance del Conde Niño'

The final chapter of *ERDSG* sees the young lovers Pelinor and the 'Caballero de Morado' together in their final resting place in what is described as the most beautiful church in the kingdom. Pelinor is put to rest nearer the holy altar as befitting the fact that he was the son of a count and the grandson of kings. The maiden is interred behind him, further away from the altar, occupying an inferior status even in death. The narrative then goes on to inform that, '[d]e la tumba de ella nació pronto un rosal blanco y de la de él un alboespino, y las ramas se abrazaban'.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁷ The romance of Fray Pedro or Brother Peter (author unknown).

¹⁰⁸ From her tomb there quickly grew a white rosebush and from his a white hawthorn and their branches embraced.

These two lines bear an unmistakable similarity to the anonymous romance entitled the 'Romance del Conde Niño' probably dating to the 15th century:

'De ella nació un rosal blanco,
De él nació un espino albar.¹⁰⁹

The romance tells of a young count who takes his horse to water on the morning of San Juan. Whilst the horse is drinking, the count sings a beautiful song that charms all of nature, and is overheard by the queen of the land. Thinking that the song is being sung by a sea siren the queen awakens her daughter to listen but her daughter lets slip that it is the 'Conde Niño' who is singing and that the song is a song of yearning for her. Angered by the thought of this love match, the queen threatens to kill the count but her daughter insists that if she does this then the queen will have to kill her too. The queen carries out her threats and the two lovers are buried before the altar of a church, but in this case, the young girl, being a princess is buried nearest the altar and the count, as someone of lesser nobility is buried behind her. A rosebush grows from the tomb of the princess and a hawthorn from the tomb of the count, and their branches intertwine, but the jealous queen instructs her servant to cut the coiled branches, at which point a heron and a sparrow hawk arise from their tombs and fly away together. The invocation of this **intertextual** comparison between the fate of the characters in the medieval Romance ballad and that of the lovers in *ERDSG* has a bitter/sweet irony with which to end the story. It allows Paloma Díaz-Mas to make a subtle point about the folly of status in chivalric society but also suggests that in spite of the imperfect world that man has created here on earth, love may reign eternal.

The symbolic use of nature to convey the theme of impossible love in the quoted lines also resonates with the *lai* or narrative poem *Chevrefoil*,¹¹⁰ written by the French poet Marie de France probably in the late 12th century. It is fitting to mention this work here as Marie's poem is derived from the Tristan and Iseult legend, which in its earliest surviving versions refer to King Arthur and his court. In the *lai* the two lovers are compared to a honeysuckle and a hazel branch. When the honeysuckle is attached

¹⁰⁹ A version of this ballad may be found at <http://ciudadseva.com/texto/romance-del-conde-nino-espana/>

¹¹⁰ Honeysuckle.

to the hazel the two lovers can survive together but if they are separated then they both die. This metaphor appears to allude to the suffering and death that the two lovers will have to endure at the end of the story. Some versions of the Tristan and Iseult story have a briar growing out of Tristan's grave whilst a rose grows from that of Iseult's. Further variants say that the two intertwining plants were the hazel and the honeysuckle.

2.8 Perceval's Soliloquy and the Concept of Courtly Love

The Grail knight Perceval's monologue provides an artistic space in which Paloma Díaz-Mas is able to comment ironically on one of the central tenets of chivalric behaviour, namely, the concept of Courtly Love. Perceval's speech opens with a comparison of the torment that he has felt in the search for the Holy Grail with that of the knight's yearning for his 'impossible love'. This term acts as the springboard for the reader to make the intertextual connection with the highly idealised practise of love relations between men and women as described in the 12th century romances of Chrétien de Troyes and known in medieval times as *Fin Amor*. In the courts of northern France, this practice (given the name of Courtly Love only in the 19th century) quickly aligned itself with the other codes of ideal behaviour, which made up the chivalric code (Pearsall 2003, 20). The new form of love service typically involved an illicit extra conjugal liaison that placed the male lover at the service of an importunate lady, usually from a higher social rank than the knight himself. In order to prove himself worthy of his lady's love, the knight had to perform courageous feats and exhibit valiant behaviour (Burns 2001, 28). However, one of the essential characteristics of Courtly Love was the experience of torment that the knight had to endure, in the knowledge that his burning love and desire would rarely lead to consummation. The effect of Perceval's description of the lovelorn knight lying in his bed, kissing his pillow and clasped in a fantasy embrace with his loved one allows Díaz-Mas to poke fun at the exigencies of the code of Courtly Love by reducing the knight to a comic figure. For the reader acquainted with the romances of Chrétien de Troyes, it evokes the tormented sentiments of the love-struck male protagonists who appear in his works. Díaz-Mas's amusing description of the lovelorn knight also ironically highlights that in the game of Courtly Love the truly important player was

the knight. Courtly Love did very little to empower or improve women's position in society; rather, it was men's feelings that were expressed and men's prowess and social standing that was at stake (Burns 2001, 23-24). Ostensibly put on a pedestal, a woman's role was to aid the knight in his quest for increased glory and honour and this she did by her offer of undying love expressed in a spirit of submission and devotion. In this respect, Courtly Love could be considered a device more for disciplining women and keeping them amused, but once the game was over she had to return to the place that God intended for her gender under the strict control of men. To further enhance his attempt to convey the anguish and pain intrinsic to the pursuit of the Grail, Perceval resorts to language and metaphors that evoke the poetry of the great Spanish poet Antonio Machado (1875-1939):

Yo voy soñando caminos
de la tarde.¡Las colinas
doradas, los verdes pinos,
los polvorientas encinas!...
¿Adónde el camino irá?
Yo voy cantando, viajero
A lo largo del sendero...
-La tarde cayendo está-
'En el corazón tenía
la espina de una pasión;
logré arrancármela un día:
ya no siento el corazón'.
Y todo el campo un momento
se queda, mudo y sombrío,
meditando. Suenan los álamos del río.
La tarde más se obscurece;
y el camino que serpea
y débilmente blanquea
se enturbia y desaparece.
Mi cantar vuelve a plañir:

I dream my way
down evening roads.
Gold hills, green pines,
and dusky oaks...
Where can the road be leading?
I sing my way along,
the road stretches away,
evening is coming on.
'Love pierced my heart
with its thorn.
One day I got it out-
now the heart is numb'.
And the land all about
grows dim and still,
ingathered for a moment.
There are sounds of wind
in the river poplars.
The dusk begins to gather
and the twisting road,
still glimmering faintly,
blurs over and is gone.

‘Aguda espina dorada,
quién te pudiera sentir
en el corazón clavada’.

My song laments once more:
‘Sharp golden thorn,
if only I could feel you
piercing my heart’.¹¹¹

The above poem, entitled ‘Yo voy soñando caminos de la tarde’, appears in a body of work first published as *Soledades* in 1902 and was then also included in the collection known as *Soledades, galerías y otros poemas* in 1907.¹¹² When Perceval speaks of the sweetness of the pain caused by the ‘espina de oro que se clava en la carne’¹¹³ (Díaz-Mas 1984, 27), and the void and emptiness which will fill his heart if it is deprived of this sensation, this provides an intertextual reference to Machado’s work, a poem that also evokes the pains of love.

Machado’s poem is a richly symbolic piece that uses the elements of the natural world to convey its poetic voice, a voice that embodies a sense of loneliness, dissatisfaction with life, and great torment, caused by the break-up of an amorous relationship. The attribution of human qualities and emotions to inanimate objects of nature, which is evident throughout the poem, is a literary device known as ‘pathetic fallacy’. The ‘caminos de la tarde,’¹¹⁴ of which the narrator speaks, suggest the metaphorical paths of life along which we all travel. Yet, the reader immediately has a sense that the speaker is apprehensive about his destiny and uncertain where these paths will lead him (¿Adónde el camino irá?).¹¹⁵ The description of the countryside as the day closes further helps to reflect the poetic voice of the poem. As the poem progresses, its mood changes to one of melancholy, which is reflected in the loneliness and emptiness that the speaker feels now that he is unable to experience the pain of love that once filled his heart. For the narrator, it appears that the sensation of being in love is a bittersweet experience as it causes acute pain like a thorn piercing his heart. This vibrant imagery intensifies the romantic aspect of the poem, as the thorn is often associated with the rose, the flower that symbolises love. The heart, as well as being

111 Translated by Trueblood (2003, 79)

112 *Solitudes, Galleries and Other Poems*.

113 The golden thorn that pierces the flesh.

114 The evening paths.

115 Where can the road be leading?

the bodily organ that symbolises life and vitality, figuratively represents the place where love resides. However, the reader is then told that the removal of the metaphorical thorn has made the speaker's situation even more unbearable as his heart is now left empty and incapable of feeling anything. As the narrator continues his imaginary walk, his sad feelings seem to intensify and it appears that the whole of nature becomes one with him, affected by and silenced by his sadness: 'Y todo el campo un momento se queda, mudo y sombrío, meditando'.¹¹⁶ The endowment of the landscape with the very human characteristics of sadness and silent contemplation is a potent example of the device of pathetic fallacy, as mentioned earlier. At this point the poem reaches its most dramatic conclusion, as the narrator's song becomes an impassioned lament to restore the sensation of that 'aguda espina dorada'¹¹⁷ which he needs to nourish him, to give him purpose and to make him feel alive. The poem's final message is that is better to carry the memory and pain of a failed love within your heart than to feel emptiness.

The themes of emptiness, loneliness and dissatisfaction with life, manifest in Machado's poem, are also relevant to the interpretation of Perceval's monologue. As a knight of the Round Table, and in his pursuit of the Holy Grail, Perceval had also experienced the uncertainty of where life's paths would take him, but his passion and love for the Holy Grail had always sustained him in his search and given his life meaning, in spite of the pain he suffered in his heart in the belief that the Grail would never come into his grasp: 'Por él luché sin tregua, seguro de que no lo lograría'¹¹⁸ (Díaz-Mas 1984, 27). In the same way that the narrator in Machado's poem, in order to preserve himself as a sentient human being, needs to relive and re-experience within his heart the pangs of desire and passion for a lover no longer in his life, Perceval also needs to experience the persistent feeling of longing for the Holy Grail which furnishes him with his own 'espina de oro'.¹¹⁹ He longs for the sensation of the sharp, golden thorn piercing his heart because this makes him feel alive. If the thorn

116 And the whole land is momentarily rendered silent and melancholy, in contemplation.

(Here I provide my own more literal translation of these lines as an alternative to the free translation offered by Trueblood (2003, 79). This is done in the hope that it will illustrate more clearly the use of pathetic fallacy in the original Spanish).

117 Sharp golden thorn.

118 I strove for it without respite, in the certainty I would never reach it.

119 Golden thorn.

is pulled out, then the heart feels nothing. Perceval knows that if the Grail were found, then the era of peace and prosperity that it would bring would mean an end to a world where war and adventure were the motivating forces for a knight's existence. For Perceval, his final path in pursuit of the Grail would be full of melancholy and nostalgia for the past and uncertainty of what destiny might bring. As King Arthur declares in his dialogue with Pelinor, war and killing are what makes the world go around (Díaz-Mas 1984, 22). Such words make the reader wonder if anything has changed.

2. 9 Gauvain's treachery

In the Middle Ages loyalty, to one's lord or king, and one's family and nation was critical for survival, and formed one of the most important pillars of the chivalric code. Its antithesis, betrayal or treason, was frowned upon and considered a heinous crime. Therefore, Gauvain's offer to betray his solemn promise to Arthur and do his best to prevent his friend Perceval from finding the Grail, is rather shocking behaviour for a knight, but perhaps less shocking if one considers the reputation that his namesake Gawain earns for himself over the course of the medieval romances in which he is featured. In *Le Conte du Graal* Gawain is criticised by Chrétien for his frivolous attachment to the opposite sex, and later, in the *Vulgate Quest* (c. 1230) and the *Prose Tristan* (c.1240) he is depicted as an unrepentant sinner and a hardened criminal respectively (Lacy 1996, 178).

Several other of the Arthurian romances that focus on Gawain, for example, *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* (c.1348) and the Middle English *Awntyrs of Arthur* (1375-1425) deal with the theme of treason and the betrayal of trust and conclude with the hero Gawain learning to understand the consequences of duplicitous behaviour. This is evident in the story of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* in which Gawain's dishonesty in not handing over the girdle that would keep him from harm was a betrayal of his agreement with Sir Bertilak, and constituted a violation of acceptable and social moral behaviour for which he had to be punished (Laing 2009,7). Therefore, it may be no coincidence that Díaz-Mas chooses the figure of Gauvain in her novel to poke fun at the importance of loyalty in the chivalric code.

Amusingly, Gauvain is even skilfully able to justify his ironically inverted act of friendship by an intertextual connection to the famous epic poem, *The Song of Roland* (c. 1040 – 1115). In this poem, Roland, a nephew of Charlemagne, attains heroic status as a result of Ganelon's betrayal. Unfortunately, Roland dies in the process! As Ordóñez rightly points out '[u]nderlying the noble ring of the knightly promise lays a mocking note of absurdity, a ripple of laughter that playfully destabilizes the apparent nobility of Gawain's [sic] pledge' (Ordóñez 1991, 153). However, faced with the prospect of having to come up with a plan of action to betray his friend Perceval, Gauvain finds himself unable to do so. As Díaz-Mas playfully points out, the Knights of the Round Table always let adventure come to them and not vice-versa: 'Largo tiempo vagó el caballero sin saber qué hacer, hasta que optó por dejar sueltas las riendas de su caballo para que él le llevase donde mejor quisiera'¹²⁰ (Díaz-Mas 1984, 80). Then, even with more pointed irony, Gauvain, bored and completely absorbed in his desire to complete his mission, fails to notice the rock in which was embedded the prow of the boat in which his dear friend Perceval had come to his absurd end.

2. 10 'El Caballero de la Choza de Tristura'

In Arthurian romance, the hermit is a figure who fulfils the function of healer, counsellor and dispenser of hospitality to strangers and knights as they make their way through the forest. Although not priests as such, they often performed the role of confessor to the troubled knight and aided him in the interpretation of his dreams and visions. In the tale of *Le Conte du Graal*, the hermit is the character that explains to Perceval the reason why he has lost his faith in God. This was due to the sin he committed in leaving his mother to die of grief when he left the forest to seek his fortune as a knight in King Arthur's court. The hermit's advice to the young knight, to repent, to love and believe in God, to honour men and women and orphans in distress, and to attend Holy Mass acts as the catalyst for Perceval's return to the Christian faith. For the medieval reader of the romance, Perceval's acceptance of this code of conduct would have reinforced the Christian faith as the essential element of the chivalric ethos (Kennedy 1974).

¹²⁰ The knight wandered about for a long time not knowing what to do, until he decided to let the horse's reins loose so the horse could lead him wherever it wanted.

However, the episode with the hermit in *ERDSG* is more suggestive of the knight/hermit encounter in *Yvain, le Chevalier au Lion* (c.1170) in another of Chrétien de Troyes' romances, albeit with a humorous reversal of the roles of the protagonists.¹²¹ In the medieval romance, a hermit cares for the distraught knight Yvain after he has been rejected by his love Laudine. After some time living in the wild and eating the raw flesh of animals, Yvain comes across a hermit's dwelling. After the hermit's initial terror at the sight of the savage knight, the two develop a relationship based on mutual charity. Paloma Díaz-Mas's text presents a complete **ironic intertextual inversion** of the romance as in her narrative it is the hermit who is distraught troubled and savage-like. He is presented as the total antithesis of the Arthurian hermit motif and the dialogue between him and Pelinor offers Díaz-Mas another opportunity to highlight the ludicrousness of Man's innate inability to find happiness. The hermit reveals that in his past, fortune had never ceased to look favourably upon him; everything he had ever wished for, including true love, had always been granted to him. He had had the greatest of knightly adventures, so great in fact that people did not believe the truth of his exploits. Discontented with his charmed life, the hermit decided to dedicate himself to the service of God, but he was also so successful at this, a fact borne out by his facility in working miracles, that he soon became fed up and turned to a life of misery and despair in his hermit's cottage. With nothing left to desire or strive for in life, the hermit issues a bizarre knightly challenge to Pelinor to prove whose woes are the greater. If Pelinor's woes were shown to be greater than his own then the hermit vows he will return to the knighthood. If not, he vows to kill himself by his own hand. Pelinor's great dilemma in his quest, between what he wants to do and what he is duty-bound to do - to save the Grail and not to save the Grail - fails to impress the hermit, as he astutely tells him that this is a very common part of the human condition. The hermit judges Pelinor the loser of the wager, as Pelinor, at least is able to experience the desire of wanting two things, even though they may be opposite and incompatible, whereas the hermit desires nothing. Unable to do anything else but be true to his knightly word of

121 In response to my question to the author in our email exchange (6/11/2018), she confirmed that Chrétien de Troyes' *Yvain* was indeed an inspiration for this scene. She also credits the influence of Cervantes' *Don Quijote* generally in her work, especially for his use of irony and subversion of roles.

honour, the hermit knight falls upon his sword, thus fulfilling the terms of the challenge that he and Pelinor had earlier entered into.

2. 11 'El romance del Conde Arnaldos'

Like the 'Caballero de Morado', Perceval is destined never to reach the Grail, but in his case, his failure to do so will be due to the impossible and ludicrous requirements of the quest that are stipulated by King Arthur. Perceval is required to arrive at the Grail Castle in the most beautiful boat that he can find, even though the castle is situated inland. The fact that he unquestioningly accepts such a doomed task, once again, makes a humorous connection between Díaz-Mas's character and the Perceval of the medieval romances. As McCullough (2006, 52-54) points out, one of the outstanding character traits of the medieval Perceval is his difficulty in posing questions of his own, as he has been taught by the knight Gornemant that the laws of chivalry demand that a good knight should not ask too many questions. This **ironic intertextual** connection not only links back to the medieval source but also points forwards as it hints at the crucial importance that the lack of communication will have in the subsequent chapter of the book which tells of the death of 'El Caballero de Morado'.

When Perceval arrives at the port several supernatural sights greet him. Seagulls cease to soar, and dip towards the water; fish ascend from the deep to swim on the surface of the sea, and seven vessels, presumed lost in faraway seas, miraculously find their way to harbour, aided by a favourable wind. After this, a fisherman arrives upon the scene and announces that his wife has given birth to their child without the pains of parturition. The sense of wonder continues with the arrival of a marvellous boat with sails of silk and gold rigging, aboard which a sailor is singing the sweetest of melodies. Perceval appears to realise that it is this mysterious song that has caused these wondrous happenings and is eager to also learn the song. In a display of child-like trust in the stranger, Perceval agrees to accompany him on a journey across the sea, to heathen lands, in exchange for the promise of being taught the song. If Perceval is able to master the song's complexities, he is promised the captaincy of the sailor's boat on their return.

The sailor's song is the romance of 'El conde Arnaldos' and Paloma Díaz-Mas faithfully reproduces all the elements of this romance so as to make this link unmissable. The action of the romance takes place on the morning of Saint John's day, which falls on June 24th. In early modern Europe, throughout the Mediterranean area, this event was celebrated as a holy day on which people believed marvellous things could happen. It was said that anyone who bathed in the sea or the rivers on the eve of St. John would be purified from all ills, and those who took to the water in the early hours of the day itself would encounter love, fertility and good fortune (Jaén 1976, 437). Another popular ritual was the lighting and leaping over of bonfires, a tradition that is still evident in many regions of contemporary Spain. In the 'Paso de Fuego',¹²² which takes place in San Pedro Manrique, Soria, in the region of Castilla y León, barefoot young men walk over the live coals of a prepared bonfire, generally carrying somebody on their shoulders. As the elements of fire and water are common symbols of purification in folklore this leads Burke (2009, 258) to believe that the roots of this feast may lie in an ancient festival of renewal, regeneration and fertility.

In the source romance Count Arnaldos is engaged in the every-day activity of hunting, a pursuit that is often used in literature to symbolise Man's constant earthly search for satisfaction (Jaén 1976, 437). His physical appearance is unkempt, and he appears distracted, giving the impression of yet another knight unhappy with his life. The appearance of the mysterious boat and the lure of the sailor's hypnotic song serve to heighten the feelings of discontent with the chivalric life that Count Arnaldos so obviously feels. The Perceval of *ERDSG* sees his own life mirrored in that of the knight Arnaldos and, like him, yearns to know the song that seems to possess the power of universal peace.

The ballad of 'Arnaldos' is a tale that appears to draw on many sources and exists in several variant forms: it is a narrative that has evolved over time forever changing the significance of the 'original' text (Lewis 2004, 49). Scholars, therefore, offer varying opinions on its interpretation. Jaén (1976, 435) develops the idea of 'El conde Arnaldos' as being an example of a 'balada mística'¹²³ which he says comes under the

122 The Fire Walk

123 Mystic ballad.

nomenclature of religious ballads but differentiates itself by being ‘más esotérica y al mismo tiempo más personal y misteriosa’.¹²⁴ Characteristically, in this type of ballad there is a symbolic meeting of two worlds often brought about by the coming together of a character who is seeking something or someone and one who is being sought (‘un buscador y un buscado’¹²⁵).

This interpretation concurs with that offered by Lewis who suggests that the ballad speaks of an encounter with supernatural forces (2004, 38). He posits that the ballad is similar to ballads from the European tradition concerning the ‘Wild Host or Hunt’. This was an ancient folk myth prevalent across Northern, Western and Central Europe, in which a ghostly group of hunters on horseback were seen to move through the skies. If any mortals got in their way the hunters would kidnap and bring them back to the land of the dead. Bearing witness to the ghoulish throng was meant to presage some catastrophe such as war, plague or the death of the person who had observed them.

Lewis makes a case for interpreting ‘El conde de Arnaldos’ as a mystical otherworld tale as all the classic elements of the genre are present in the narrative. Firstly, there is a hunt that brings the protagonist into contact with the supernatural. Rogers (cited in Lewis 1974, 44), elucidates the different functions the hunt may perform in the *Romancero*, one of which is to act as a passing over point to an imaginary or marvellous world. It is in this category that she places the Arnaldos ballad. In ‘Arnaldos’ this encounter is a form of entrapment and role reversal as the knight/hunter who is normally the ‘buscador’ is transformed into the ‘buscado’ and taken away on the boat. These reversals are common in folk tradition, where hunters of noble descent often become the prey of some supernatural adversary (Lewis 2004, 44). Another marker that identifies the ballad as a supernatural encounter is the element of water as we are often told about supernatural beings who sail across the water in search of some sought-after mortal. Débax and Martínez Mata (cited in Lewis 2004, 42- 43) have also suggested that the romance tells of a supernatural encounter, although their interpretation emphasises associations with death, pointing out that

¹²⁴ More esoteric and at the same time more personal and mysterious.

¹²⁵ The seeker and the sought.

many traditions place the land of the dead on the other side of the water. The boat as a representation of a half-way state, neither in water nor on dry land, the enchanted sleep, which intensifies the idea of an encounter with something unworldly, and the strange behaviour of animals and mysterious music, all contribute to the mystical element of this tale.

At the end of the romance, the reader is left with no clear idea of who the sailor is or the nature of his song: simply that the encounter has involved some sort of spiritual experience. So what is its intertextual function in the context of *ERDSG*? The ballad may lend itself to a Christian interpretation, in which case the image of the boat on 'las aguas del mar'¹²⁶ might evoke a connection to the Book of Genesis 1:2 'y el Espíritu de Dios se movía sobre la superficie de las aguas'¹²⁷ which then makes the possible identification of the sailor as Jesus Christ, who is often referred to as 'The Fisher of Men' (Jaén 1976, 437). The mysterious song could then represent the potential of religion to bring peace and happiness to the soul of any person who might choose to surrender to its power. If the romance is interpreted in this way then the reader will appreciate the irony of the fact that Perceval, in his episode on the boat, has already experienced inner happiness, peace and harmony which are the very qualities he has searched for as a knight, and always believed that only the Grail could bring. Therefore, any continuation of his quest for the Grail should seem pointless to him. However, an equally valid interpretation of Perceval's voyage might be that his journey to the otherworld was simply a presage of his imminent death, a fact that he failed to comprehend. The abrupt ending to the ballad parallels Perceval's sudden return to reality. True to his namesake in the original Grail romance, he insists on interpreting the words of his promise to the letter. His instructions to navigate the ship on land causes the vessel to become 'landwrecked' (Ordóñez 1991, 154) but the absurdity of the situation aside, it does ensure that Perceval dies a knightly death with his honour intact.

126 The waters of the sea.

127 And the Spirit of God moved on the surface of the waters.

3. *ERDSG* as a Work of Historiographic Metafiction

One of the aims stated in the introduction to this chapter was to assess to what extent *ERDSG* could be considered to be a work of historiographic metafiction. Its hallmarks were listed as intertextuality, the ironic distancing of the author, self-reflexive metafiction, the creative use of humour, and persistent use of parodic dialogue with the past, which is loaded with ideological implications to question linguistic and literary conventions. Paloma Díaz-Mas has stated in the past that she recognizes that some of her works may be read as historiographic metafiction. Evidence for this may be found in her 2006 article 'Cómo se escribe una novela histórica o dos', in which she reflects upon the artistic creation of her later novels *El sueño de Venecia* (1992) and *La tierra fértil* (1999). In the article, she identifies the purpose of these two novels as an attempt to make a critical reflection on the historical past and to question whether this past can truthfully and accurately be told. She then goes on to say that she recognises that these are elements that might categorise her work as historiographic metafiction: 'En algún caso me han dicho que se llama *metaficción historiográfica*'¹²⁸ (Díaz-Mas 2006, 38). The insights gained from the textual analysis in this chapter have shown that *ERDSG* can rightly take its place alongside these aforementioned novels as an example of postmodern historiographic metafiction which, through parody, contests and questions, subverts and mocks Arthurian chivalric society, the values of gender, class and sexual choice embodied in it, and the relevance this has for the present day.

'The challenging of certainty, the asking of questions, the revealing of fiction-making where we might have once accepted the existence of some absolute "truth" - this is the project of postmodernism' says Hutcheon (2000b, 48), and in the novel *ERDSG* nothing is certain. The duplicity of Arthur, the double identity of the 'doncella' and the 'Caballero de la Verde Oliva', the double meaning of the title of the novel (discussed in Chapter 3), all point to the fact that in fiction, as in history, there is no single, but a plurality of possible truths about the past and this stems from the difficulties that discourse poses in representing reality. In *ERDSG* Paloma Díaz-Mas demonstrates this power of discourse to present an alternative reality, an alternative scenario for the

¹²⁸ In such a case I've been told this is called *historiographic metafiction*.

characters of the great legend. The admired and wise King Arthur is turned into an aged rapist of women and shows himself to be capable of deceit and duplicity; his band of knights, so loyal and true in the romances exhibit a complete lack of morals and are willing to disobey the wishes of the king; the intransigent behaviour of the young knight Pelinor leads to the cruel death of the woman he loves and the Grail falls in to the hands of a rustic whose greed for wealth and sex is the antithesis of the mythical brave and pure Galahad, who was the one chosen to discover the Holy Grail (Hernández 1990, 451). As Hernández says, the subversive presentation of these traditional characters of Arthurian romance, manifested in their need for instant gratification, whether it is violence, greed or sexual satisfaction (now their own personal Grails) ironically displaces the transcendent and eternal essence of the search for the Holy Grail as it appears in the medieval Arthurian romances.

This chapter has demonstrated that the use of intertextuality, a hallmark of historiographic metafiction, is fundamental to the narrative structure of *ERDSG* and it is through this sophisticated rhetorical technique that Paloma Díaz-Mas not only subverts the Arthurian text but also uses it as a device to discredit modern discourse. The author herself recognizes the possibility of double readings for her novel: '[e]n muchos aspectos la novela admite una lectura literaria, una lectura "real" aplicada al mundo medieval y luego una lectura perfectamente aplicable al mundo actual'¹²⁹ (Diéguez, 1988, 88). The chapter has shown that the parallel structures of text and intertexts produce an interdisciplinary environment where, through parodic irony, Díaz-Mas is able to question, criticize and undermine some of the established patriarchal monolithic truths that have been handed down through history and persist in contemporary society, whilst also granting her reader the possibility of creating meaning and a new way of interpreting her rewriting of the quest for the Holy Grail. As observed, this is done on an **intertextual**, **textual** and a **semantic level**, at the **site of discourse**. For example, at a textual level, it has been shown how the story of 'El Caballero de Morado' closely imitates the text of the medieval ballad 'El romance de la doncella guerrera', but it is an imitation with a critical difference, which Hutcheon reminds us is a noticeable characteristic of parody as it features in

129 In many respects the novel permits a literary meaning, a real reading applied to the medieval world and then a reading perfectly applicable to the present day.

historiographic metafiction. Díaz-Mas's text constitutes an almost word for word repetition of the medieval ballad, imitating its form in matters of style, diction, meter, rhythm and vocabulary but, at the same time, she substitutes subject matter or content which are alien to that form by introducing a number of humorous asides and a poignant difference in the outcome for the protagonists of each story. This is representative of how Linda Hutcheon believes that historiographic metafiction will always work within conventions in order to subvert them. The 'Caballero de Morado's' choice of purple as her knightly colour and the mirror of Venus depicting the closed fist over the pommel of a sword to emblazon her standard has the comic effect of elevating this female knight from the downtrodden medieval maiden to a humorous caricature of a contemporary radical feminist: yet, these feminist trappings do not bring honour to this independent woman as might be expected in a contemporary novel written by a female. To the contrary, she ironically becomes a victim of the male honour code to which she aspires and strictly adheres. On the other hand, the doncella of the medieval ballad, although equally brave, resigns herself to the fate of a medieval woman and is 'rewarded' with marriage.

Paloma Díaz-Mas demonstrates her ironic playfulness by exploiting the dialogic nature of language at the lexical level and many instances of this technique are to be found in the novel. In the scene at the Grail Castle, Díaz-Mas's creative lexical choices and imagery involving the enormous, gleaming, erect lance which the knight offers to put at the maidens' service with no risk of ever tiring, fills the entire Grail maidens' discourse with sexual innuendo, which bestows power on the maidens through language. The effect of metaphorically emasculating this most virile and powerful symbol of the warrior knight permits Díaz-Mas to cast yet another humorous aside on the martial values of chivalric society (Díaz-Mas 1984, 72-74).

In her theorising on historiographic metafiction, Linda Hutcheon states that the protagonists who occupy the pages of the metafictional text tend to be the marginalized figures of history (Hutcheon 2000b, 113-14). Hutcheon refers to these characters as the 'ex-centrics' and suggests that even well known historical personages may take on ex-centric status and be portrayed differently to the way they have been normally depicted in history or literature (Hutcheon 2000b, 114).

Hutcheon also suggests that writers of postmodern fiction are able to present these 'ex-centrics', like 'El Caballero de Morado', who have been marginalised because of 'class, race, gender, sexual orientation or ethnicity' (Hutcheon 2000b, 12), in a new light, and with new political significance, in the postmodern recognition that our culture is not 'the homogenous monolith (that is middle-class, male, heterosexual, white, western) we might have assumed' (Hutcheon 2000b, 12).

In a 1997 article entitled 'Memoria y olvido en mi narrativa' Paloma Díaz-Mas claims that her novels do not attempt to reconstruct a true version of historical events, nor a picture of what life was like for her characters, as are the aims of the true historical novel genre. As a novelist, her interest is how the marginalised and insignificant characters of the past, whose stories have been forgotten or never recorded, have affected the course of history. She states that such people have faded into oblivion because 'la Historia es una selección de recuerdos: solo es histórico aquello de lo que hemos guardado memoria'¹³⁰ (Díaz-Mas 1997, 87). In other words, she suggests that all recorded facts and events are affected by the selection, ideological agendas, prejudices and narrative positioning of their authors and the result is the handing down of a distorted version of History to future generations. Therefore, it is important to realise that our knowledge of the past has been affected by a number of chance happenings, upon the survival of some historical documents and not others and also to question whether it is indeed possible to trust these surviving documents because, even if subjected to the most rigorous academic and scientific scrutiny, errors or different opinions on interpretation will always occur. These concerns about the artificial nature of fiction and history are reflected in *ERDSG* and this theoretical self-awareness is another feature of historiographic metafiction. What we have been told about the albeit legendary King Arthur and the times and society he is purported to have lived in has come down to us through texts which have been written and rewritten throughout the ages by authors from Geoffrey of Monmouth to Malory, all of which have reflected the authors' own particular opinions, aspirations, agendas and prejudices. *ERDSG*'s alternative narrative made possible by subversive intertextuality permits the reader to imagine another more desirable female-oriented text in contrast to the traditional medieval one of patriarchal control and violence.

¹³⁰ History is a selection of memories: historical fact is only what has been committed to memory (i.e. not forgotten).

By locating the process of discrimination of women in History it is possible to contrast the past with the present and this is another feature of postmodern historiographic metafiction. Thus, by choosing to make the female knight 'El Caballero de Morado' the main protagonist of her novel, Díaz-Mas opens up her text to women's issues such as social discrimination and sexism, not only with relation to how they affected the medieval woman but also how they are still relevant today. Women's contribution to and influence on history is often ignored or forgotten because Western society has traditionally been dominated and ruled by men. The hierarchical division between male qualities (active, intellectual, social) and female qualities (passive, domestic, private) is a cultural construct, created by men to suit their own needs and is a theme that will feature in the next chapter of the thesis.

Conclusion

This chapter has focused on parody as a mode of intertextuality and the association of both concepts with the postmodern novel, particularly historiographic metafiction. Paloma Díaz-Mas has stated that intertextuality plays a very important part in the creative architecture of her novels and admits that this creative process is influenced not only by her own life experiences but also by the texts that she has read.¹³¹ However, whilst acknowledging that, in order to look for the meaning of her text, one has to look frequently outside the narrative, to the complex network of texts invoked in the reading process. The chapter asserts that Paloma Díaz-Mas intentionally uses intertextuality to manipulate and open up her text for the reader, in such a way as to create new possible readings of her narrative. This dual aspect of her authorial creativity is confirmed in the following quote:

Es decir, en el proceso de creación de una obra literaria hay una parte de actividad consciente y de trabajo laborioso, pero otra parte - muy importante - de actividad inconsciente; de manera que el escritor no siempre se da cuenta de por qué está

¹³¹ The author states this in her article 'Cómo se escribe una novela histórica o dos' (2006, 48) where she says, 'en un escritor, lo autobiográfico no es sólo lo que se ha vivido, sino lo que se ha leído' (the autobiographical for authors is not only what they have experienced in life, but also what they have read).

inclinándose por una opción y descartando otras¹³² (Díaz-Mas 2006, 37)

This chapter has highlighted the principal technique used by Paloma Díaz-Mas to give her text ironic value, this being the intentional placement of semantic markers that allude intertextually, in a parodic mode, to other Spanish literary sources. Díaz-Mas does not make the reader's intertextual journey difficult; to the contrary, she occasionally replicates the intertextual source almost verbatim, which is reflective of her playful attitude to literature, another characteristic of postmodern fiction, and her recognition that when we write we are always using the words that other people have used before us. *ERDSG* is a series of *vignettes*, a composition of pre-existing types, patterns and motifs that are removed from their original context in the Arthurian romances and then reshuffled to form a new work. Paloma Díaz-Mas does not view her literary creation as a sublime activity with any particular transcendental quality. Her goal, she says, is to undermine the pretension of the act of writing:

Escribo porque me lo paso bien escribiendo y, como no me parece que la misión del escritor sea trascendente, no tengo ninguna ambición de que eso quede por los siglos de los siglos como legado al universo.¹³³ (Diéguez 1988, 80)

In the introduction to this chapter, it was suggested that the many allusions to the Spanish female ballads encouraged a feminist reading of *ERDSG*. Yet, when speaking about herself as a novelist Díaz-Mas tends to resist being categorised as a feminist author:

Me parece perfectamente lícito que algunas escritoras elijan como tema la condición de la mujer, pero que no sea

132 That is to say, in the process of creating a literary work there is a part that is conscious activity and hard work, but there is another part- importantly- of unconscious activity; with the result that authors do not always realise why they favour one option and disregard others.

133 I write because I enjoy writing and, as I don't believe that an author has a spiritual mission, I have no ambition to see my work endure for centuries as a legacy to the universe.

obligatorio porque eso me parece paternalismo por parte de las mujeres hacia las mujeres.¹³⁴ (Diéguez, 1988, 88)

Mérida-Jiménez states that, as an author, Díaz-Mas ‘no es una escritora amoldable a los patrones femeninos al uso’¹³⁵ (Mérida-Jiménez 2001, 128), a fact which is borne out in the narrative of *ERDSG*. The novel has no feminist heroine and neither is there a hero: both the doncella and Pelinor are pawns and victims of the chivalric honour code and militarism that defines their social system. Notwithstanding, Paloma Díaz-Mas patently pays attention to women’s position in society and she expresses these feminist concerns by breaking down masculine authority by subtle rhetorical mechanisms, i.e. comic irony so as to expose the fragility of Man’s domination.

In the exploration of the complexities of the attribution and appreciation of irony at the site of discourse, the importance of the interactive relationship between the ironist and the interpreter of irony has come to the fore. The analysis has shown that language is not intrinsically ironic but has to be read at least as double in order to find an ironic meaning. This is not always discovered, however, as it depends greatly on the breadth of knowledge and experiences of the reader, but when it is, it inevitably brings a greater understanding and appreciation of the text. A detailed analysis of *ERDSG* has aided an understanding of how readers arrive at their ironic interpretation, a salient part of this process being the experiencing of ‘irony’s edge’. ‘Irony’s edge’ always starts with a semantic or even a visual trigger that promotes the sense that some other meaning lays beyond the page. The power which this ‘unsaid’ meaning wields over what is stated in the text challenges the reader to make a critical judgement about the author’s intentions in using a particular word, phrase or expression, which then paves the way for the reader to enjoy the text at another level.

So what relevance then does Paloma Díaz-Mas’s rewriting of this ancient tale of the Holy Grail have for contemporary society? The text invites us to reconsider the eternal theme of Man’s inability to be happy in this world and appreciate that this is a

134 I think it is fair enough that some women writers choose to write about the social situation of women, but it should not be compulsory because that seems to me to be paternalism by women against women.

135 She is not a writer who fits in with the usual feminist stereotype.

problem of his own making. Man's failure to find answers to the meaning of life has always led him to imagine totems and objects with magical powers, such as the Holy Grail, in the hope that these might bring him eternal happiness and contentment, but these are always a pipe dream and nobody manages to find them. Interestingly, Díaz-Mas has explained that it is her fascination for objects of the past, rather than creating the feeling of an historical epoch or authentic characters, which draws her to writing about history: 'Objetos del pasado han inspirado algunos de mis cuentos'¹³⁶ (Díaz-Mas 2006, 40). As observed in the novel, Díaz-Mas expresses scepticism that Man could ever be happy, even if such a dream were to be fulfilled, because the most important thing is the impossible goal itself.

The next chapter of this thesis will continue to examine how the elements of subversion in intertextuality and other double-layered modes of expression typical of postmodernist texts manifest themselves, especially concerning the representation of the 'body', in *ERDSG*. In this chapter, Paloma Díaz-Mas's great talent for humour will be foregrounded. In the words of Ostriker 'what is supposed to be sacred becomes a joke... For laughter "the scourge of tyrants" is the most revolutionary weapon in literature's arsenal' (Ostriker, cited in Walker 1995, 173).

¹³⁶ Objects from the past have inspired some of my narratives.

Chapter 5: Gender, Discourse and the Representation of the 'Body' in *El rapto del Santo Grial*

Introduction

In 1983, when speaking about feminist literature at the Feria del Libro de Madrid, the Spanish novelist Carme Riera stated that she saw women's writing as going in two major directions characterised by an increasing awareness of women's marginal status and the vindication of 'una nueva palabra de mujer, conectada con el propio cuerpo para subvertir leyes, códigos y clasificaciones'¹³⁷ (Riera cited in Ordóñez 1991, 25). It is this idea of women fighting back with the 'body' against the laws and restrictions of a historically patriarchal society that forms the backbone of this next chapter. Since the earliest days of second-wave feminism in the 1960s, feminists in the West have offered different approaches to the understanding of the central role of the body as a factor in women's social and sexual oppression. As Elizabeth Grosz has pointed out, for much of history the opinion has been that 'Women are somehow *more* biological, *more* corporeal, and *more* natural than men' (Grosz 1994, 14). Challenging such assumptions has required feminists to address corporeality in order to explain and confront constructions of sexed difference. Some early feminist theorists, such as Betty Friedan and Shulamith Firestone, who are referred to in Section 2 of this chapter were influenced by the idea of biological essentialism.¹³⁸ They insisted on the centrality of the material or physical body and the idea that women's fulfilment and liberation could only come about when they could distance themselves from their biological bodies, whilst others, influenced by poststructuralism and postmodernism, have called in to question the fixedness of the so-called natural body 'positing instead a textual corporeality that is fluid in its investments and meanings' (Price, Shildrick, 1999, 1), meaning a 'body' that is a product of circumstances, upbringing and culture. This chapter will chart some of the many different trends in feminist thinking and demonstrate how such theories may be used to offer a reading of *ERDSG*. The chapter takes as its main focus the understanding of the 'body' using post-structural theories, which 'many radical

¹³⁷ A new woman's word, connected to her own body to subvert laws, codes and classifications.

¹³⁸ The belief that human nature (masculinity, femininity etc) is an innate or natural essence.

feminists have taken up as an effective tool for understanding subjectivity, gender and society and for devising strategies for change' (Weedon 1999, 100). Of particular importance in the chapter is the question of the power of language in the construction of character, gender and subjectivity and how the appropriation and domination of masculine, patriarchal discourse by women can be used as a tool for change. In furthering this understanding the theoretical contribution of French feminism and the concept of *écriture féminine* have been utilised. Examples will be offered from the text to demonstrate where its female characters use language anarchically to rupture male discourse and from this rupture create new possibilities and meaning. This is achieved by Paloma Díaz-Mas's consistent and manipulative play on the polysemous nature of language, which has been evidenced in Chapter 4 especially in her use of ironic and often humorous *double entendre*, frequently with the male and female body playing a central role in the humour. The discussion will also encompass postmodern theoretical frameworks that focus on the social construction of the 'body' such as in the Foucauldian tradition, 'with its reduction of the body to a surface on which the technologies of power and knowledge inscribe their effects' (Longfellow 1990, 179). Foucault's 'docile bodies' thesis and Judith Butler's concept of gender as performativity will be addressed. The chapter will also consider the use of humour in *ERDSG*, looking at the way the joke functions at a semantic level and consider why, in the hands of women writers or orators, joking can be used as an effective weapon against patriarchal oppression. However, as a starting point, the chapter opens with a discussion of the legacy of Western philosophical thought with regard to the ways it has influenced cultural opinion about the 'body' and the inferiority of the female 'body' in particular.

1. The Soul or Mind/Body Distinction in Western Philosophy

Traditionally, in Western metaphysics, most of the ways in which we have come to think about and make sense of the world have been structured into binary oppositions: for example, being/nothingness, thought/language, culture/nature, self/other, mind/body, reason/emotion, male/female, white/black, to enumerate just a few. This ancient tradition of dichotomous thinking goes back many centuries to philosophers such as Aristotle (c.384-322 BC) and especially Plato (c.428-348 BC). To

look at the world through the perspective of binary oppositions usually involves adopting a hierarchical viewpoint: one term in the binary structure always represents some higher principle or ideal, with greater cultural value, while the other is always something lesser or subordinate. The positive term of the binary pair tends to precede the negative term in the pairing and each term can only be understood in reference to the other, and only as what the other is not. The structure of the binary opposition and the fact that the binary only has meaning in relation to the other side means that every opposition posits a centre, a place from which the whole system comes and which regulates the structure. Jacques Derrida, in his essay 'Structure, Sign, and Play' (1967), speaks of the collection of terms that serve as centres to various philosophical systems:

It would be possible to show that all the names related to fundamentals, to principles, or to the center have always designated the constant of a presence - *eidos*, *arché*, *telos*, *energeia*, *ousia* (essence, existence, substance, subject) *aletheia*, transcendentality, consciousness, God, man and so forth. (Derrida 2001, 353)

Derrida points out that according to traditional philosophical thought the centre was said to signify the ultimate source of meaning or truth in a culture, and which, paired with any and every signifier, created the relation of signification, which made a sign able to say something. In his essay Derrida further explains the function of the centre:

The function of this center was not only to orient, balance, and organize the structure - one cannot in fact conceive of an unorganized structure - but above all to make sure that the organizing principle of the structure would limit what we might call the *play* of the structure. (Derrida 2001, 352)

From this quote, we can see that the function of the centre was also regulatory. It had to ensure that all units operated according to the rules, and hold together the binary

concepts in a firm relation to one another so that meaning could be established in terms of what side of the binary slash concepts should go.

Derrida's essay marked an important milestone in philosophical thinking as he questioned the idea of the fixed centre which claimed to represent some ultimate 'word, presence, essence, truth or reality' which acted as 'the foundation for all our thought, language and experience' (Eagleton 2008, 113). The 'presence' of which Derrida speaks in the first quotation, through which all meaning has been sought, has been substituted throughout history with various ideals: God, Man, substance, authority and so on. His important point was that the centre's claim to be the 'meaning of meaning' was a construct rather than an essential truth, and had been constructed through a series of preferences and repressions, which have privileged certain values and arguments over others. Derrida's theory has been adopted by feminists to show that subjectivity is constructed and is not innate or genetically determined, but socially produced in a range of discursive practices, economic, social and political. Within the hierarchized binaries, the feminine has consistently been posited as inferior to the masculine, always appearing on the devalued side of the opposition. Consequently, this has permitted patriarchal society to harbour a set of material and ideological practices that have oppressed women as a class (Colebrooke 1997, 81).

The assumption that women are naturally different from men is fundamental to the history of civilization and this difference is most often grounded in biology. Both Aristotle and Galen considered the female anatomy to be an inferior inversion of the male body. Ancient medical illustrations depicted the female body as having an undescended penis and testes, supposedly maintained internally because of the female body's excessive moistness and coolness, whereas, the heat of the male body caused the male reproductive organs to descend and thus turn outwards (Shilling 2016, 26). The female body's supposed 'lack' of heat allegedly led to a craving to supplement its 'absence' and this was achieved by seeking out the hottest and most 'complete' being possible, that is, the male. The concept of heat, therefore, came to be linked to female sexual desire and fertility, a notion which permeated popular thought and literature throughout the medieval period and helped reinforce male

fear of female sexuality (Robertson 1993, 147). An appreciation of the ancients' deprecation of the biological female body is important for the understanding of the mind/body dualism as it reveals that throughout history the body was not considered to play a part in what makes us human beings. It also helps to explain how the assignment of natural and unalterable sex differences to men and women as fixed identities has condemned women to unequal status in society.

It is also important to consider, that '[w]ithin the Christian tradition, the separation of mind and body was correlated with the distinction between what is immortal and what is mortal' (Grosz 1994, 2). The soul was a God-given entity as distinguished from the mortal, lustful, sinful body. According to Christian doctrine women's bodies were considered to be more sinful than men's because all women were considered the figurative descendants of Eve, the mother of sin, who had succeeded in tempting Adam in the story of the Creation (Shahar 1983, 3). The perceived biological limitations of women's bodies, limitations related to their incompleteness and imperfections and their supposedly adulterated souls, historically ensured the subjugation of woman and always relegated her to the negative pole of binary comparisons. This biblical representation of the 'body' will be returned to in Chapter 8 of this thesis in the textual analysis of *Artorius*.

2. The Feminist Response

Feminist theories have challenged philosophy's many gender-biased concepts and problems that have led to the exclusion and inequality of women. They have included a wide range of positions embracing liberal, radical, Marxist and multicultural points of view, but all have shared the common aim of liberating women from their subordination. The first wave of Western feminism, in the 19th and late 20th century was mainly concerned with women's struggle for the vote. The second wave, the women's liberation movement of the 1960s and 1970s, focussed on the quest for equal legal and social rights. The idea was that if women were given the same educational, occupational and political opportunities as men they would realize their potential and no longer be subordinate. Although liberal feminism achieved the extension of most civil rights to women, radical groups of feminists pointed to the

limitations of their achievements, arguing that they had based their struggle for equality on trying to become the same as men. Liberal feminists did not try to achieve individual freedom and choice or transform accepted norms of masculinity or femininity (Weedon 1999, 15). Elizabeth V. Spelman (1982) argued that some of the early feminists such as Simone de Beauvoir in *The Second Sex* (1949), Betty Friedan in *The Feminist Mystique* (1963) and Shulamith Firestone in *The Dialectic of Sex* (1970) tended to uncritically accept the aspects of masculinist tradition that informed ideas about 'woman's nature'.¹³⁹ These feminists believed that women's liberation would only come when women were allowed to distance themselves from the less important human tasks involving bodily functions and were encouraged to do the more cerebral things in life as men have always done. Firestone, in particular, traced the oppression of women to what she called a 'fundamental inequality' produced by nature: 'half the human race must bear and rear the children of all of them' (cited in Spelman 1982, 123). As both Spelman and Weedon concur, '[t]his position implicitly endorsed the long-established mind/body split in Western thought' (Weedon 1999, 101)

Later feminists began to adopt a more celebratory stance of women's bodies. Spelman selects the work of Adrienne Rich in her book *Of Woman Born* (1976) as showing the way that feminist theory should be heading, namely towards regarding women's physicality as 'resource, rather than destiny' (cited in Spelman 1982, 126). Rich encouraged women to embrace their physicality whilst at the same time encompassing and not denying what is called 'mind'. She does this in the process of trying to redefine the dimensions of childbirth, as she tries to show why childhood and motherhood need not mean what they have under patriarchy. Rich suggests that the institution of motherhood has 'incarcerated' women in its insistence on seeing woman mainly as a reproductive machine. She insists that women's maternal bodies should be seen as a source of positive values that induce pride rather than shame.

The third wave of radical feminism focussed on women's differences from men, but at the same time steered away from the idea of biological determinism, questioning any

139 The feminist Toril Moi believes that many feminists have overlooked the originality of Simone de Beauvoir's understanding of the 'body' as 'a situation', failing to understand that her idea is a sophisticated alternative to contemporary sex and gender theories. For Beauvoir, the possession of the usual biological and anatomical sexual characteristics is what makes a woman a woman but this has no negative consequences for feminist politics.

theories of sexual and gender difference which appealed to the fixed meaning of 'bodies'. Radical feminists also expressed an interest in language, believing that language is a male-constructed system that is only representative of men's experience and consequently limited for articulating women's experiences. As a result, radical feminists have asked how women can use existing language to resist phallogentric language and patriarchal forms of subjectivity. In the 1970s, French feminist theory represented by writers such as Julia Kristeva, Luce Irigaray and Hélène Cixous assumed the existence of a different or feminine language, which can enable women to articulate an identity, freed from patriarchal colonization. Their concept of *écriture féminine* emphasized the idea of 'writing from the body' as a subversive exercise. Radical feminists believe that it is discourse or language that produces meaning and subjectivity, rather than reflecting them, thus making language and subjectivity on-going sites of political struggle.

3. Writing and Speaking from the 'Body' (Textual analysis)

The reader's first encounter with 'El Caballero de Morado' is when she physically leaves the all-female space of the *gynaeceum*, an antechamber where medieval women would participate in the exclusively feminine practice of spinning and enters the traditionally male space of the king and his courtiers. The motivation for her daring action arose when she overheard her father's disparaging indictment of her mother's failure to produce a male offspring amongst seven daughters, a fact that brought great dishonour to his family name as it meant that he had no son to send in search of the Holy Grail:

Oyó esto la más pequeña de las hijas del anciano caballero, que estaba sentada en un estrado de palo de rosa en la estancia contigua y, armándose de valor, dejó la rueca y entró en la sala donde estaba el rey con todos sus cortesanos.¹⁴⁰ (Díaz-Mas 1984, 13-14)

140 The youngest of the old knight's daughters, who was sitting on a platform made of rosewood in an adjacent room, heard this and, plucking up courage, left the distaff and entered the room where the king and his courtiers were gathered.

It is at this point that 'El Caballero de Morado' figuratively writes herself into the text, making her mark both physically and verbally in the narrative. As Hélène Cixous points out in 'The Laugh of the Woman Writer', '[w]oman must put herself into the text - as into the world and into history - by her own movement' (Cixous 1976, 875). According to Cixous, patriarchal oppression has made this a difficult manoeuvre as women have been brainwashed into accepting the confines of a contained world. Patriarchal indoctrination has meant that women have grown up in a climate of fear, and any attempt to express their opinions and desires, to explore something new, whether through singing, writing or speaking, makes women feel that they are making trouble or that they must be sick to experience such desires. This male repression, Cixous says, can be undone or destabilized by writing, which she views as 'the very possibility of change, the space that can serve as a springboard for subversive thought, the precursory movement of a transformation of social and cultural structure' (Cixous 1976, 879).

In Arthurian literature, women of the court would generally be confined to the castle compound while the privileged male knights would go out into the forest on quests and adventures. 'El Caballero de Morado' proves an exception to this, moving from the passive binary position to the active, not only physically, by moving from the space of the antechamber, but also verbally, in opening up her challenge to patriarchal society through language. King Arthur greets the young maiden's request that she should be allowed to join the search for the hallowed Holy Grail with shock and disbelief. His words, '[s]in duda has perdido el juicio'¹⁴¹ clearly resonate with Plato's misogynistic opinion that women were incapable of lucid thought. His reference firstly to the physical impediment of the female breasts 'téticas redondas'¹⁴² (Díaz-Más 1984, 14) and secondly, to the tell-tale marks of exterior beauty, the 'trenzas doradas'¹⁴³ (Díaz-Más 1984, 15) clearly highlight his opinion that a woman's biology and femininity are undesirable traits for a knight, as they would interfere with her quest to find the Grail. The maiden's verbal challenge may be seen as a flouting of the authority of the Law of the Father, the patrimonial order of laws and restrictions that within Lacanian psychological thought controls desire and the

¹⁴¹ Surely you have lost your mind.

¹⁴² Rounded little breasts.

¹⁴³ Golden braids.

rules of communication, and to which the female has to acquiesce in order to enter into the symbolic order, the social world of linguistic communication and knowledge of ideological conventions. The difficulties that women may experience in their endeavour to transgress this rule and the strategies they may employ in their attempt to do so are manifest in the following extract by Cixous:

Listen to woman speak in a gathering (if she is not painfully out of breath): she doesn't 'speak', she throws her trembling body into the air, she lets herself go, she flies, she goes completely into her voice, she vitally defends the 'logic' of her discourse with her body; her flesh speaks true. She exposes herself. Really she makes what she thinks materialise carnally, she conveys meaning with her body. She *inscribes* what she is saying because she does not deny unconscious drives the unmanageable part they play in speech. Her discourse, even when 'theoretical' or political, is never simple or linear or 'objectivised', universalised; she involves her story in history. Every woman has known the torture of beginning to speak aloud, heart beating as if to break, occasionally falling into loss of language, ground and language slipping out from under her, because for woman speaking - even just opening her mouth - in public is something rash, a transgression. A double anguish, for even if she transgresses, her word most often falls on the deaf masculine ear, which can only hear language that speaks in the masculine. (Cixous 1997, 98)

Many of the traits of the creative feminine speech to which Cixous alludes in the above quotation are reflected in the maiden's spirited retort to King Arthur's misogynistic comments. With her well-chosen words, '[b]ajo la cota de malla poco importa que haya teticas redondas o pecho velludo, y no eran menos redondas las tetas de las Amazonas, según dice Platón y otros muchos lo corroboran'¹⁴⁴ (Díaz-Más

¹⁴⁴ It matters not whether beneath the suit of armour there lies rounded little breasts or a hairy chest, and as Plato says and others confirm, the breasts of the Amazons were no less rounded.

1984, 15), the maiden gives voice to her rebellion through language, breaking the silence to which women have been condemned by patriarchy. Rather than turn away from the physicality of her body, she uses her corporeality to vitally defend the 'logic' of her discourse. By involving her own story with that of the great female warrior tribe, the mythical Amazons, who were skilled in the art of warfare and the use of weapons, she is able to make the case that her biological sex should not be an impediment to the fulfilment of her desire to join the quest for the Grail. The evocation of Amazonian matriarchal society adds a powerful feminist boost to the maiden's request as the reversal of gender roles in the story of the Amazons was seen to be symbolic of the threat to world order when women fulfil the traditional role of men. When the Amazons were mentioned in the works of the great Greek and Roman classical scholars it was, therefore, a reminder and warning to ancient societies of the power of women. Armed with the example of female power set by the Amazons 'El Caballero de Morado' is, therefore, equipped with the perfect weapon to strike a blow in the defensive armour of the misogynist Arthur.

In her essay 'Sorties' Cixous describes the power of woman speaking, '[h]er tongue doesn't hold back but hold forth, doesn't keep in but keeps on enabling' (Cixous 1997, 97). These words resonate perfectly with the nature of the dialogue between 'El Caballero de Morado' and King Arthur. The maiden's language is poetic, explosive and liberating. Her constant use of the imperative mood, 'no maldigas a mi madre',¹⁴⁵ 'no me tengas por necia',¹⁴⁶ 'no me tengas por alocada'¹⁴⁷ (Díaz-Mas 1984, 14) reveals a bold confidence in her ability to challenge the opinions, not just of a man but of a king. The use of anaphora in these successive utterances enhances the persuasive quality of her speech and has the effect of heightening her passion and desire to prove herself on male terms.

'El Caballero de Morado's' creative and inventive use of language is her attempt to subvert the patriarchal discourse to which she is subjected. For invention to be possible, Cixous says there has to be in the inventing subject an abundance of the

¹⁴⁵ Do not speak badly of my mother.

¹⁴⁶ Do not consider me foolish.

¹⁴⁷ Do not think I am mad.

'other'. There are two aspects of the 'other' to which she refers. The first is the nurturing voice of the 'mother' (the first other) from which the child has later to distance itself in order to become a fully-fledged speaking and social being. This first female voice, '[s]ings from a time before law, before the symbolic took one's breath away and reappropriated it into language under its authority of separation' (Cixous, 1997, 111). The second aspect of the 'other' is the number of selves that inhabits the feminine woman. It is a celebratory 'other' that extols woman's difference from man at all levels, psychic, physical and intellectual and how this can emerge through behaviour, conduct and character. The force of the experience of the 'other' is unsettling and disturbing but is what gives woman the desire to know, to celebrate her difference and experience a change that makes her live.

3. 1 The Body in Pain: The Death of 'El Caballero de Morado'

'El Caballero de Morado's' inventive use of language to advance her cause is further witnessed in the short scene that describes her death at the hands of her sweetheart Pelinor but, on this occasion, her endeavour fails. Having come upon each other by chance in the woods, and unaware of the female knight's identity, Pelinor presses her to reveal her name, lineage, destination and purpose of her journey. The *doncella* is only prepared to reveal her destination and it is at this point, with the mention of the Castle of Acabará, that 'El Caballero de Morado's' fate is sealed. A daylong battle between the two ensues and the vanquished *doncella* finds herself defenceless and prostrate on the ground, at the mercy of her victor. Pinned down by the weight of her attacker upon her body, and the point of his sword pressed menacingly to her throat, she is faced with the imminent threat of her own death. At this juncture in the text, there is a shift in the representation of the *doncella's* body to that of the oppressed victim. Yet, Pelinor, in spite of possessing the power to immediately terminate his adversary's life delays his actions and continues to subject the unknown knight to persistent interrogation as to her identity and provenance. In the scenario which ensues, the relationship between the two protagonists may be compared to the relationship between 'the torturer' and the 'torturer's victim'.

Elaine Scarry, in her work on the body in pain, offers a valuable insight into the relationship between torturer and victim, and how this is reflected in language and power relations. 'Torture consists of a primary physical act, the infliction of pain, and a primary verbal act, the interrogation' (Scarry 1987, 28) and the nature of this physical pain, she says, is inexpressible:

Thus when one speaks about 'one's own physical pain' and about 'another person's physical pain', one might almost appear to be speaking about two wholly distinct orders of events. For the person whose pain it is, it is 'effortlessly' grasped (that is, even with the most heroic effort it cannot *not* be grasped); while for the person outside the sufferer's body, what is 'effortless' is not grasping it. (Scarry 1987, 4)

In other words, when we listen to another person trying to explain what their pain feels like, irrespective of the fact that we might be in close physical proximity to them, it is impossible to grasp or to share their pain, as the expression of pain is resistant to language (Scarry 1987, 4). Scarry suggests that pain is resistant to language because it differs from most other human interior states of consciousness, in terms of not being able to be expressed by reference to objects in the external world. For example, we can say that we have fear of, or love for, dogs or cats, but physical pain has no referential content: it may only be expressed as an 'as if' structure, a sensation described by employing metaphors and similes.

What is witnessed, in the death scene of 'El Caballero de Morado' is therefore not just the physical destruction of the *doncella's* body but also the effect that her accumulative pain has on the language that she speaks. It should be remembered that the *doncella* has not only experienced the physical pain and exhaustion of battle but is also in psychological pain, as she knows that she is about to be killed by the man that she loves. According to Scarry, '[t]orture inflicts bodily pain that is itself language-destroying, but torture also mimes (objectifies in the external environment) this language-destroying capacity in its interrogation, the purpose of which is not to elicit needed information but visibly to deconstruct the prisoner's voice' (Scarry 1987, 19-

20). The persistent interrogation and the demand for answers to specific questions are credited for being the motive for the torture, as if the answers to them are crucial to the outcome of the torture, but in reality, this is a fallacy. As Scarry says, '[t]he prolonged interrogation, however, also graphically objectifies the step-by-step backward movement along the path by which language comes into being and which is here being reversed or uncreated or deconstructed' (Scarry 1987, 20). To witness the moment when pain causes a reversion to the pre-language of cries and groans is to witness the destruction of language.

The ability to bring about the cessation of torture depends on the ability of the suffering person to communicate the reality of physical pain to those who are not themselves in pain. For 'El Caballero de Morado', to try and save herself and confess her true identity and mission is not an option, as this would be an act of betrayal of herself, her king and of her family name. With her body physically weakened after her long battle, she still desires to speak and to make her voice heard. As stated above, she is without recourse to anything else to protect herself. As she has no lance (the metaphor for the male organ that is used throughout the text), she tries to manoeuvre herself into a more strategically powerful situation and make her voice a weapon that can be used in the aggressive situation in which she finds herself. The option that 'El Caballero de Morado' chooses is to attempt to express her pain by utilizing an allegorical explanation of her subjugated situation reflected in the recitation of the ballad 'La doncella guerrera', which in reality, is her own true-life story:

Pero escucha, te recitaré un hermoso cantar que mi madre solía
entonar en los días de mi niñez; seguramente te causará gran
placer oírlo y es posible que así salve yo mi vida.¹⁴⁸ (Díaz-Mas
1984, 59)

The discussion of the Spanish ballad in Chapter 4 of this work, as an especially female voice form, often accompanied or put to music, reverberates with Hélène Cixous's idea of the 'song', which she associates with the first music of the voice of love – the

¹⁴⁸ But listen, I will recite a beautiful song which my mother used to sing in my childhood days; it will definitely give you great pleasure to hear it and it may even save my life.

pre-Oedipal maternal 'Voice' that sings from a time before the Law of the Father, before the symbolic took the female voice away. Cixous believes that this song never stops reverberating in the female psyche. Therefore, it is to the voice of the 'm(other)' and the song she sang her as a child that 'El Caballero de Morado' turns as a counter-discourse in her struggle to survive. Tragically, Pelinor is unable to put himself in the position of the female other and the words of the ballad fall on his deaf, masculine ears, in spite of the *doncella's* valiant attempts to enable his understanding. In a battle of constant shifts and negotiations for power, the two opposing voices fight it out in a conflicted interaction of different points of view on the world.

When the traitorous knight Gauvain discovers the body of 'El Caballero de Morado' in the woods, his gaze immediately falls upon the incision to her neck and the open wound that ruptures her abdomen. As stated in Chapter 4 and as the reader may recognise, the Spanish word 'vientre' means both abdomen and womb, which makes these wounds have a powerful metaphorical resonance in that they represent the destruction of two important facets of being a woman: the gift of a voice and the ability to produce another life. At this juncture in the text, the reader can detect a marked change in the mood and language of the knight, who prior to this discovery had been languishing without direction and inspiration in the woods, trying to hatch a plan as to how to betray his noble friend Perceval. The sight of 'El Caballero de Morado's' wounded and lifeless body, however, inspires him to recite a lengthy monologue, overflowing with misogynistic, metaphorical language that perfectly illustrates the way in which patriarchal society in the Middle Ages reduced women's 'bodies' to entities upon which were inscribed the norms and desires of men. It begins:

¡Ah, dulcísima doncella, que en todo quisiste emular a los varones! No está el mundo hecho para estas cosas ni las mujeres podrán entrar en liza como iguales de los hombres mientras éstos posean lanza o espada.¹⁴⁹ (Díaz-Mas 1984, 81)

149 Ah! Sweet maiden, who wished to emulate men in all things! The world is not ready for such things nor will women be able to enter into battle as men's equals while it is men who have the lance and the sword.

Gauvain's speech goes on to highlight that women's purpose was to exist as an accessory to men in all their ventures. He declares: 'Que en la vaina que sostenéis envainen ellos su espada y servidles el carcaj para sus flechas',¹⁵⁰ a comment rife with sexual innuendo that refers to the coital act and reduces the woman's physical body to a mere receptacle for male needs. Gauvain even callously suggests that the *doncella's* defeat and tragic demise may be considered a punishment for leaving her rightful place at the loom and transgressing the female behavioural code. His mournful lament over 'El Caballero de Morado's' mutilated body is nothing other than a piece of propaganda for the indissolubility of patriarchal chivalric society and as such is a distraction from the violent act that has taken place.

4. The 'Body' as a Social Construct. Foucault's Concept of Sexuality, Power and 'Docile Bodies'

In the mid 1970s, the French philosopher Michel Foucault stimulated a great deal of feminist interest in his ideas about the relations between power, the body and sexuality because it avoided the assumption that the oppression of women was caused by men's possession of power. The first main point of feminist interest centred on Foucault's idea of 'biopower' as a means of controlling human behaviour. 'Biopower' takes two main forms. Firstly, there is **the discipline of the body**, where the human body is treated like a machine, to make it more productive and economically viable. This form of 'biopower' appears in the military, in education, in the workplace, and seeks to create a more disciplined and effective population. The effect of 'biopower' on human behaviour has led to what Foucault terms as the 'docile bodies' thesis. According to Foucault in *Discipline and Punish* (1975), '[a] body is docile that may be subjected, used, transformed and improved' (Foucault 1991, 136). Foucault suggested that humans with such institutionalised 'docile bodies' were produced as a result of the transition from absolute monarchical power to modern disciplinary power in the seventeenth century. The system of disciplinary power, which grew up in institutions such as prisons, schools and hospitals after this transition, became very effective in transforming and controlling people and their actions, mainly achieved by subjecting people to constant processes of surveillance.

150 May they sheath their swords in the scabbards that you bear them and serve as the quiver for their bows.

The well trained and passive ‘docile bodies’ produced were obedient to rules, self-disciplined and became useful and obedient members of society. Foucault admits that these measures of social control are not a new phenomenon as the roots of such practices may be traced back to the Middle Ages. The qualities of self-control, discipline and obedience to rules were also required for the success of the monastic system, the army and the chivalric system. The order of knighthood required that every knight should be obedient to the will of God and his king and that in his service to them and his country his behaviour should be exemplary. A later and more positive aspect, from a feminist point of view, of Foucault’s theory of power, was his idea of ‘agonistic’ power, or the notion that power is never fixed but circulates. This definition of power suggests that power should be seen as a network of relationships of power among subjects who are to an extent free to act against and resist this power. Secondly, ‘biopower’ is linked to the **state’s involvement in the regulation of the population**. Supervision of the population was ‘effected through an entire series of interventions and *regulatory controls: a biopolitics of the population*’ (Foucault 1998, 139). These interventions focused on human biological processes ‘propagation, births and mortality, the level of health, life expectancy and longevity, with all the conditions that can cause these to vary’ (Foucault 1998, 139). Effectively, this new power over life meant that all aspects of human life increasingly fell under the charge of politics, including the categories of sex and identity. The administration of bodies and calculated management of life meant that direct forms of repression and constraint could be done away with in favour of social control achieved by subtler and more insidious strategies. Feminist scholars who have agreed with this Foucauldian conception of power have seen the ‘docile bodies’ thesis as a compelling explanation for women’s acquiescence with patriarchal standards of femininity.

4. 1 Textual Analysis

The question to be asked is to what extent could the ‘Caballero de Morado’ be considered a ‘docile body’ throughout the narrative of *ERDSG*? As a female courtier, the disciplines she would have been subjected to would have been the dictates imposed on women in chivalric society. Although it is impossible to generalise about the status and experience of medieval women most probably few had control over the

direction their lives would take, even those who led relatively privileged lives. The two main alternatives for a medieval woman were either to make themselves useful and productive members of society by marrying, bearing children, doing the household chores and helping with their husband's work or to 'take the veil' and become a nun. Whatever the scenario, the medieval woman would normally live her life either in the enclosed space of a monastery, a castle, or a peasant hovel. Therefore, most indications would point to the fact that medieval women were trained to be 'docile bodies'.

However, when the *doncella* makes her dramatic entrance into the male space of the king's Great Hall and enters into discourse with the patriarch Arthur she does not do so as a 'docile body' or as a passive victim of the constraints of medieval disciplinary power. If we apply Foucault's idea that power must always be seen in terms of a relationship then we can see how she is able to do this. Within the discourse of power Foucault has stated that there is always the possibility of a reverse discourse, which enables powerless groups to speak on their own behalf and demand recognition:

We must not imagine a world of discourse divided between accepted discourse and excluded discourse, or between the dominant discourse and the dominated one; but as a multiplicity of discursive elements that can come into play in various strategies. (Foucault 1998, 100)

Therefore in the initial discourse between Arthur and the *doncella* we can distinguish the toing and froing of power positioning. As Foucault says:

There is not, on the one side, a discourse of power, and opposite it, another discourse that runs counter to it. Discourses are tactical elements or blocks operating in the field of force relations. (Foucault 1998, 101-2)

The first 'power point' is scored by Arthur who cites the *doncella's* sex as a prohibition from taking up arms and becoming a knight, but as Foucault (1998, 101)

also says, '[d]iscourse transmits and produces power; it reinforces it, but also undermines and exposes it, renders it fragile and makes it possible to thwart it'. Therefore, the *doncella* is immediately able to find the weak link in Arthur's argument with her retort that historical precedent had already been set by the female warriors of the ancient Amazons, proving that women could fight as well as men. At the end of their discursive encounter, the valiant resistance put up by the *doncella* to every gender-related obstacle thrown in her path by Arthur to prevent her becoming a knight at arms, leaves her at the advantage in this power relationship. But Arthur, not wishing to be outdone by this triumph of feminine discourse, resorts to a physical trial, a challenge more favourable to masculine strength, to make the *doncella* prove her worthiness to become a chivalric knight. The *doncella* also excels in the physical challenge of sheathing Arthur's heavy sword in her scabbard but, as the reader who appreciates the ironic double reading of the narrative will understand, this scene may be interpreted as a metaphorical rape, and the relations of power once again turn in favour of Arthur.

The next time that the *doncella* appears in the narrative is when she crosses paths with her sweetheart Pelinor in her search for the Holy Grail. With her identity hidden from view by her knightly armour, she is pressed by Pelinor to reveal her identity, lineage and destination but the female knight's response is to display a stubborn loyalty to the rules of the chivalric code:

...No me es lícito, por juramento que tengo hecho ante Dios y ante el rey a quien sirvo, decir mi nombre ni mi alcuña, ni de dónde vengo y adónde voy...¹⁵¹ (Díaz-Mas 1984, 59)

From her answer, it is obvious that the 'Caballero de Morado's' 'body' is now deeply marked by the disciplines of the chivalric code and this is reflected in her adherence to proper knightly behaviour and complete loyalty and obedience to God and King. In this sense it could be argued that her body conforms to the idea of Foucault's 'docile body' as it has shown that it is pliable and capable of being 'manipulated, shaped,

¹⁵¹ By the oath that I have sworn before God and King it is unlawful that I tell you my name or lineage, or where I come from or to where I am going.

trained' (Foucault 1991, 136). Yet, contradictorily, the *doncella*, by assuming the identity of 'El Caballero de Morado', has shown that she also does not conform to the concept of the 'docile body' in the sense that she has already transgressed all the rules of the chivalric code, which excluded women from the knighthood. The irony of the situation is that the 'Caballero's' death is not so much the result of her daring adventure as a cross-dressing knight but of her valiant attempt to be loyal to the ridiculous and nonsensical conventions imposed by masculine chivalric society.

4. 2 Gender, the 'Body' and Performativity

From the 1990s onwards, following the ideas of Foucault, feminists turned their attention to the power relations working through disciplinary practices. Feminist theorists tried to move the focus on the 'body', '[f]rom the periphery to the centre of analysis, so that it can now be understood as the very "stuff" of subjectivity' (Grosz 1994, ix). Grosz points out that for feminists such as Hélène Cixous, Luce Irigaray and Judith Butler

the body is crucial to understanding woman's psychical and social existence, but the body is no longer understood as an ahistorical, biologically given acultural object. They are concerned with the *lived body*, the body insofar as it is represented and used in specific ways in particular cultures... On one hand it is a signifying and signified body; on the other, it is an object of systems of social coercion, legal inscription, and sexual and economic change. (Grosz 1994, 18)

Butler's performative account of gendered subjectivity has dominated feminist theory since the beginning of the 1990s. Butler rejects the view that gender differences, with their accompanying presumptions of heterosexuality, have their origin in biological or natural differences. Masculinity and femininity are learned behaviours created by the dominant discourses in society and fostered through repetitive performance:

Gender is the repeated stylization of the body, a set of repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory frame that congeal over time to produce the appearance of substance, of a natural sort of being. (Butler 1990, 32)

Butler stresses that, '[g]ender reality is performative which means quite simply that it is real only to the extent that it is performed' (Butler 1988, 527). This idea opens up an alternative possibility for the consideration of a person's gender as a fluid variable that shifts and changes in different contexts and at different times. For Butler there is no inner truth or essence about gender: her premise is that social reality is not a given but is continually created as an illusion 'through language, gesture and all manner of symbolic social sign' (Butler 1988, 519). She goes on to argue:

If the inner truth of gender is a fabrication and if a true gender is a fantasy instituted and inscribed on the surface of bodies, then it seems that genders can be neither true nor false, but are only produced as the truth effects of a discourse of primary and stable identity. (Butler 1990, 136)

Butler suggests that the continual repetition of gender acts in everyday activities has been one way in which masculine culture and masculine rule-governed discourses have ensured that they maintain and exert power in society. Yet, there is always a possibility of a subversion of identity within the practices of repetitive signifying: '[t]he subject is not *determined* by the rules through which it is generated because signification is *not a founding act, but rather a regulated process of repetition* (emphasis in original) that both conceals itself and enforces its rules precisely through the production of substantializing effects' (Butler 1990, 145). In other words, oppressed identities, those identities that do not conform to these artificial norms, may challenge gender identity through alternative performative acts because these norms do not have any historical claim to truth, and are simply perpetuated by continual citation and re-enactment.

When a woman puts on an item of female clothing or acts in a particularly feminine way she does so because she feels as though she is a woman and this justifies her

compliance with certain gender norms. It is a performance rather than a natural way of being. One way of parodying this performance is the act of 'drag' and cross-dressing. Butler suggests that, '[d]rag is subversive to the extent that it reflects on the imitative structure by which hegemonic gender is itself produced and disputes heterosexuality's claim on naturalness and originality' (Butler 2011, 85). The drag artist, therefore, shows up society's norms as conventional and artificial and enables us to maintain a critical or ironic distance to them. The drag parody points to the fact that since there is no essential basis of gender identity it can be disrupted, resisted and overturned.

4. 3 Textual Analysis

'El Caballero de Morado' does not wake up one day and decide that she is going to don the knight's garb and set out in search of the Holy Grail and act like a man. Her behaviour is the result of a set of circumstances, such as the desire stirred up within her to exculpate her mother who failed to produce a male heir and her aspiration to defend her father's honour and name. Her challenge to male discourse and conventions is performed through actions and choices that come to the foreground at a particular time and in a particular context, rather than as a result of a trait that pre-exists within her. Her rebellious act of cross-dressing may, therefore, be considered an act of resistance against the power structures, which regulated her life and identity, and an attempt to ridicule imposed cultural expressions and performances. As Salih (2002, 65) suggests, in drawing attention to the mismatch between the body of the performer and the gender being performed in a parodic performance such as cross-dressing, 'the imitative nature of *all* gender identities' is revealed. Drag performance, therefore, destabilizes the 'truth' of sexual gender identity by pointing to the fact that there is no obligating reason that necessitates the constant mimicry of performed identities. As we cannot escape power we can only undermine it from within.

5. Joking, Discourse and the 'Body'

The final section of this chapter will examine some aspects of *ERDSG* as a 'joking text', as joking is also a form of discourse. As noted earlier, women have traditionally been required to be passive in nature whilst humour and joking are often considered to be socially acceptable forms of aggressive activities. Indeed, much of the theorising on humour has suggested that humour is status or power-related and essentially the domain of men. There is also fairly consistent support for the proposition that joking is a behaviour in which high-status people, such as group leaders engage, again a category more likely to favour men (Robinson, Smith-Lovin 2001, 140). Based on her critical analysis of women's humour in American culture, Nancy Walker (1988) suggested that women prefer to express humour in the company of other females and this is also borne out in Robinson and Smith-Lovin's research where they concluded that women feel more comfortable joking amongst themselves, in what they call cohesion-building humour which is used to strengthen bonds to the group (Robinson, Smith-Lovin 2001, 126). However, encouragingly, Walker points out that from the 1980s onwards, 'the women's movement has provided many women with the courage and sense of community to claim in their writing the stance of superiority that the humorist requires if she is to confront and transcend cultural restrictions' (Walker 1988, 181). Women writers have begun to use subversive humour and joking to great effect to symbolically attack the established order and to express dissatisfaction with the status quo. When the language used to do this is coated with wit and irony, as in *ERDSG*, the moral and philosophical points to be made are often more effective.

The theoretical model applied in this chapter for the reading of *ERDSG* as a 'joking' text is that expounded by Susan Purdie. It is appropriate for the task as it stresses the linguistic manipulation involved in all joking and **manipulation** of language is one of the key themes of this thesis. Purdie argues that the execution of a joke involves a transgressive ab(use) of language and its structural hierarchies. As discussed in Chapter 3, Saussure was among the earliest to point out that language consists of the use of 'signs' which consist of two elements: the 'signifier' and the 'signified' or designated concept (Saussure 1960, 66-7). Purdie suggests that Saussure's concept of

language, which is later developed by Roman Jakobson and also used by Jacques Lacan in his philosophy of language, is however, limited because it leads us to believe that, '[m]eaning depends upon restricting elements to appearing singly in each semantic space - only one element taken as a signifier clipped to only one element recognised as its signified' (Purdie 1993, 21). Purdie suggests that this point of view means that, 'no signing can happen "properly" if one signifier generates more than one (*incompatible* - definitionally different) signified' (Purdie 1993, 18). Yet, as she goes on to argue, the multiple generation of signifieds is precisely what happens in the mechanism of joking. In this way, joking can be said to be a transgressive act and an [ab]use of language.

Purdie's model of joking involves the dynamic constitution of two discursive relationships, that of the Joker/Teller and the Interpreter/Audience. The discursive relationship has the same characteristics as that which is essential for the appreciation of irony as described by Linda Hutcheon (1994). In the same way, both the ironic utterance and the joking utterance demand that an emotional response is evoked in the interpreter or receiver if the ironic or joking effect is to be successful, which sometimes, it is not. Therefore, the triggering utterance that is produced by the Teller and received by the Audience is only part of the total utterance that constitutes a joke; the totality of the joking experience is produced in the moment of the exchange, between the two parties (Purdie 1993, 5). As Purdie states: 'The work a joking mechanism performs is to "trap" the "Audience" into a situation where their proper activity of "making sense" inevitably entails producing Symbolic error' (1993, 37). As has already been explained, the symbolic order is the world of linguistic communication into which we must all enter as children in order to be able to communicate and deal with others. It involves the submission to the Law of the Father, a set of rules which operate simultaneously as a powerful threat forbidding what we are constantly tempted to do and say, but also as an 'order' which, when obeyed, enables us to speak with effect and experience full subjectivity. As Purdie claims:

Joking paradigmatically involves a discursive exchange whose distinctive operation involves the marked transgression of the

Symbolic Law and whose effect is thereby to constitute jokers as 'masters' of discourse: as those able to break and to keep the basic rule of language, and consequently in controlling possession of full human subjectivity. (Purdie 1993, 5)

The formal arrangement of the utterance leads the Audience to produce double signification. This could be a 'naughty' word, an offensive word, a suggestive or taboo image and so on. The transgressive utterance is confirmed as discursively valid (the right use of language) but at virtually the same moment is marked by the Teller and Audience as an erroneous message and when this happens we find it funny and laugh. The appreciation of this misuse of language invokes a pleasurable sense of power both on the part of the joker and on the interpreter of the joke. As Purdie remarks: '[f]unniness involves at once breaking rules and "marking" that break, so that correct behaviour is implicitly instated; yet in transgressing *and* recognising the rules, jokers take power over rather than merely submitting to them' (Purdie 1993, 3).

5. 1 Textual Analysis

In the closing section of *ERDSG* the 'Caballero de la Verde Oliva' arrives at the Castle of Acabará and rests on a stone seat once used by the guards who were entrusted with the safety of the castle. The intertextual links this scenario makes with 'La leyenda de las cien doncellas', the Spanish ballad *El paipero* and the French romance *Yvain* have already been documented in Chapter 4 but it is the behaviour and discourse of the once incarcerated maidens that is of interest here. This behaviour markedly contrasts with that of the subdued and downtrodden silk weavers in the *Yvain* romance. Chrétien's tale reveals that the dishevelled maidens, their faces pale from hunger, are too ashamed to even lift their heads and gaze upon the gallant knight Yvain, who had come into their midst. However, the flushed faces of the grail maidens of *ERDSG*, do not hesitate to gaze with longing and desire upon the approaching 'El Caballero de la Verde Oliva' in his resplendent armour, and as he disarms they remark on each item of his chivalric paraphernalia with splendid innuendo. The coquettish remarks and questions of the more 'innocent' of the young

damsels are verbalised by their leader, Blancaniña, in a triumph of comic discourse which resonates with the essence of Bakhtinian carnivalesque humour.

The subversiveness and unruliness of carnival behaviour can firstly be detected in the conduct of the blushing young maidens in *ERDSG* as they dare to question and discuss amongst themselves the purpose of the knight's 'gleaming and enormous lance' and secondly, in the language of Blancaniña who, in greeting the 'Caballero de la Verde Oliva', immediately takes control and dominates the discourse between them. The visual pleasure derived by the maidens as they canvass the knight's body playfully subverts the idea of the controlling 'male gaze'; a term coined by Laura Mulvey (1993, 116). Mulvey explores the idea that the male gaze denies women human identity by relegating them to the status of objects to be admired purely for their physical appearance. However, in this instance, the male protagonist of the narrative has to bear the burden of sexual objectification and is stripped of the active potency of the male erotic look by the excited maidens who make it a weapon of their own, resulting in the triumphant desacrilization of socially constructed roles. Blancaniña's confident presentation and speech violate the expected norms of behaviour prescribed for a medieval woman. Furthermore, she does not only emerge as the dominator of the discourse: in the literary hands of Paloma Díaz-Mas she becomes a joker, the perpetrator of an aggressive act, which immediately puts her, a woman, in the pleasurable position of control and power. Through the joking words she enunciates, she can flaunt her sensuality and challenge conventional definitions and power structures. She becomes the 'unruly' woman of Carnival.

When Paloma Díaz-Mas chooses to playfully describe the 'Caballero de la Verde Oliva's' lance, the most visible and valued weapon in the chivalric knight's arsenal, as 'aquella reluciente y enorme verga'¹⁵² (Díaz-Mas 1984, 72), the dual signification of the Spanish word 'verga' as rod and also as slang for penis, combined with the adjectives enormous and shining, triggers a titillating and transgressive thought in the readers mind which is funny or amusing. This leads to the taboo image of the lance/rod as the gleaming and erect male member and creates salacious pleasure, a

¹⁵² that shining enormous rod.

social intimacy, momentarily shared between the Teller and the Audience when the Audience 'gets' the pun.

In order to appreciate the total comic effect of the scene between the 'Caballero de la Verde Oliva' and the grail maidens, it is important for the reader to remember that the man beneath the armour is none other than the uncouth rustic who, only a matter of hours earlier, has hurriedly been taught the rudiments of chivalric behaviour and the basic use of arms by Lanzarote. Therefore his appearance as a knight of King Arthur and the great social standing, which this should have entailed if his identity were authentic, is essentially a sham. Complicit in this knowledge, the author and reader are now able to experience further comical enjoyment as the 'Caballero de la Verde Oliva', without realising what is happening, finds himself the 'butt'¹⁵³ of Blancaniña's jokes:

me llena de alegría la vision de una lanza tan inhiesta como la tuya, que me parece de las mejores y más robustas que he visto; si bien es verdad que, como doncella que soy y poco avezada en las artes de la lucha, no he tenido ocasión de comprobar la fortaleza y el valor de arma ninguna. Pero paréceme que tu lanza ha de cumplir bien su cometido y que ninguna dama a cuyo servicio la pusieres quedaría enojada o poca satisfecha.¹⁵⁴ (Díaz-Mas 1984, 72)

His linguistic impotence becomes the focus of comedy and functions to degrade him from his position of power as a man and the embodiment of the knightly chivalric code. As Purdie (1993, 80) explains, when a person who should normally have power of some kind over the perpetrator of the joke does not have this power, then the degrading effect of laughing that person out of their position of power and putting

153 As Purdie explains 'the butt is constructed as an identity who is discursively incompetent, and whose ineptitude distinguishes them from us, reinforcing our own identity as fully subjected, "law-abiding" masters of discourse' (Purdie 1993, 59).

154 The sight of such an upright lance as yours fills me with much happiness, as it is one of the best and most robust that I have ever seen; and it is true that as a maiden and unaccustomed to the art of war, I have had no experience of weapons of any sort. But it seems to me that your lance will serve its mission well and no maiden, in whose service you would put it, would be angry or dissatisfied.

them down as representatives of authority is perceived as funny. The butt of a joke makes a symbolic mistake but is unable to mark it and therefore:

The complete operation of joking further involves the tacitly affirmed correct usage and, therefore, a reinstatement of the Law as the third position, through which Teller and Audience construct themselves, as subjectively valid. However, the particular targets of joking are not reinstated, because the erroneous usage is displaced on to them. (Purdie 1993, 59)

The 'Caballero de la Verde Oliva' responds to Blancaniña's discourse which is full of sexual innuendo with laughable solemnity and unwittingly carries on the dialogic sexual imagery: '[e]n cuanto a lo que decíais de mi lanza, pronto podréis comprobar cómo es de esforzada y valerosa, si me dáis [sic] licencia para subir y ponerla a vuestro servicio'¹⁵⁵ (Díaz-Mas 1984, 73). With the image of the lance as the male sexual organ already marked as a transgressive image in the reader's mind, it is easy to also mark 'to put at your service' as a sexual comment. The 'Caballero de la Verde Oliva' continues his descent into complete linguistic ineptitude when he comments: '[y] no sólo al servicio de una sola, sino al servicio de cien y de mil damas la pondría yo gustoso y veríais como no desmayaba'¹⁵⁶ (Díaz-Mas 1984, 73). Blancaniña's retort to the knight's offer to put his lance at the disposal of each and every maiden is delivered with exquisite tongue in cheek humour in the words, 'vergüenza es tener inactivas armas tan valerosas habiendo aún doncellas en el mundo'.¹⁵⁷ Of course, the outcome of this witty scene is the impregnation and subsequent falling pregnant of all one hundred and one maidens. The status of the butt as a stupid person is intensified and ironically, in spite of his sexual potency he is reduced to an impotent figure, as he has no option as a gallant knight other than to marry them all.

155 With regard to what you say about my lance you will soon be able to test how brave and valiant it is if you permit me to come up and put it at your service.

156 And not only at the service of one, but I would willingly put it at the service of a hundred, even a thousand maidens and you would see how I would not falter.

157 It's a shame not to use such powerful weapons when there are still maidens in the world.

Conclusion

The problem of women's historical marginalisation within Western society traces its roots back to the beginnings of Western culture and the dawn of philosophical thought. This chapter has demonstrated that the influence of philosophers such as Plato and Aristotle and the persistence of their doctrine of female imperfection in terms of biology, spirituality, intellect and moral fibre did much to ensure the subjugation of women through the ages. This chapter has also gone on to show how female writers and theorists have taken up the gauntlet in the challenge to eradicate the inequalities women have faced under patriarchy. Successive waves of the feminist movement, each with different ideas, have worked to destabilize the foundations of Western thought by attempting to reverse the hierarchical binary oppositions that have led to women's inferior status in society. The feminist theoretical approaches to studying the 'body' that have been introduced in this chapter, namely, the concept of *écriture féminine*, the 'docile bodies' thesis and the question of gender and performativity have been presented as possible frameworks for appreciating *ERDSG* as a novel.

However, as previously debated in Chapter 4, can *ERDSG* be described as a truly feminist novel? As Catherine Bellver has highlighted, '[t]he novel resists being either an indictment or a serious defence of any feminist ideology, remaining instead poised with playful indifference between the two extremes' (Bellver 1996, 152). Indeed, Paloma Díaz-Mas has always resisted being labelled as a feminist writer and confirmed this in an interview with María Luz Diéguez in 1988. The main female protagonist of *ERDSG* is not the typical feminist heroine. She does not succeed in her feminist quest; indeed, it directly leads to her death. In spite of setting off on her adventure adorned with all the symbolic trappings of feminism, these are not enough to help her achieve independence and bring honour to her father's name. Even the other female characters in the novel, Blancaniña and the Grail Maidens, do not achieve true independence and freedom as women. In spite of the role reversal in male/female power relations in the episode at the Castle of Acabarás the sexual liberation achieved by the maidens is short-lived as they all discover they have been made pregnant by the rustic knight and as such find themselves coerced into

marriage and forced to leave Arthur's kingdom in order to live in the East, their futures not clear.

Nevertheless, there is no doubt that Paloma Díaz-Mas's revisiting of the tale of the Holy Grail presents a social critique of women's oppression in society which has resonance in today's modern world. Her attack on patriarchal society includes gender and class as factors that have led to women's discrimination throughout history and this is evident in 'El Caballero de Morado's' story, which shows that women's inclusion into dominant society does not imply the acceptance of feminine difference but demands they adapt to masculine values. Therefore, her narrative provides a worthy canvas for the feminist debate about the representation of the 'body' and the politics of gender and how these are socially constructed. This chapter has demonstrated that by the **manipulation** and **intertextual** use of language Paloma Díaz-Mas is able to offer her reader a feminine rather than a feminist alternative to the story of the quest for the Holy Grail. This is achieved in a number of ways. It has illustrated how the young *doncella* constantly uses language that is in touch with the forces and impulses of her own 'body', whether she is defending herself from the misogynistic remarks of King Arthur or attempting to save her life at the hands of Pelinor. In both scenarios the *doncella* looks to empower her precarious position by resorting to an alternate feminine discourse, in the first instance, by a direct allusion to the great and heroic deeds of women in the past and in the second, by recourse to a Spanish ballad, a particularly female voice form.

The final section of this chapter has demonstrated the many instances in which Paloma Díaz-Mas uses 'joking' discourse to deconstruct and reveal the absurd, masculine, martial values of chivalric society. This is done through parody, irony and caricature. The rhetorical devices of parody and irony, because of their dialogic nature, are excellent choices for the veiled representation of bawdy and tendentious humour. Such humour serves to provide an outlet for expressing hostility in a culturally accepted way towards ideologies that dominate women: it may be considered a symbolic attack on the establishment without subverting it. Díaz-Mas's playful use of language, especially the employment of the sexual *double-entendre*, displays a skilful **manipulation** of language intended to invoke a funny or taboo

image in the mind of the reader that results in laughter. For the joker, the act of joking is one of the most powerful ways to express identity and power. Poking fun at or ridiculing a person or concept to elicit laughter is a potent weapon in the literary arsenal of women and Paloma Díaz-Mas uses this technique liberally at the expense of men whenever she wants to critique medieval chivalric patriarchal society.

Chapter 6: The 'Age of Arthur'

Introduction

In the introduction to this thesis, it was stated that an important aim of the project was to examine the use of **intertextuality** in both *ERDSG* and *Artorius* and investigate how their respective authors use intertextuality to **manipulate** the desired reading of their texts and in the case of *Artorius*, to produce a **propagandistic** text. As the literary analysis of *ERDSG* has demonstrated, the paratexts of a novel are areas where authors can shape readers' opinions and influence their perception of their texts. The first section of this chapter will, therefore, renew the discussion on paratexts with respect to *Artorius*, paying special attention to the author's notes that appear at the end of the novel. This will take the form of a systematic examination of the veracity of the historical claims that César Vidal makes in these notes concerning the identity of King Arthur, the location of his court, and information about other characters from the legend as they are portrayed in the novel. As these claims are investigated, they will be referenced to the points they appear in the text. The second section of the chapter will be dedicated to identifying and evaluating the medieval historical **intertexts** upon which César Vidal structures his argument for the historicity of Arthur and bases the details for his novel's historical setting. The medieval texts which will be looked at in detail are *De Excidio et Conquestu Britanniae* by Gildas (c. 540),¹⁵⁸ the *Historia Brittonum* attributed to Nennius (c. 828-9),¹⁵⁹ and the anonymous *Annales Cambriae* (c.960-80).¹⁶⁰ These texts are sources prior to Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia Regum Britanniae* (c.1136-1139),¹⁶¹ the text that glorified Arthur and made him into a warlord and Emperor. However, Geoffrey's text has long been considered an unreliable source of evidence for the history of the period in which Arthur was thought to live, because as Green (2007, 10) points out, '[i]t is too late, too legendary, too untrustworthy and too full of evidence for it having been constructed and written with a strong and guiding authorial viewpoint, to have any value in these regards'.

¹⁵⁸ *On the Ruin and Conquest of Britain.*

¹⁵⁹ *The History of the Britons.*

¹⁶⁰ *The Welsh Annals.*

¹⁶¹ *The History of the Kings of Britain.*

Like other historical novelists who have attempted to historicize Arthur, César Vidal has looked to these early medieval sources to make his case, believing that within them lies some inherent historical meaning that allows the 'real' historical figure of the Arthur of the past to be recovered in a verifiable historical context. Yet, there has been significant contemporary debate amongst historians as to whether the past can ever be reconstructed and explained objectively from historical sources. Munslow asks this very question in *Deconstructing History* (1997, 1), suggesting that in the production of knowledge about the past it is the role of the historian, not his primary sources, that is the most important factor. Munslow believes that evidence can only be turned into facts through the narrative interpretations of historians. This is also the view of Hayden White who insists that the historical narrative does not pre-exist but is invented by the historian by using a process of selecting significant elements from the evidence which, when strung together produces a meaningful explanation or an emplotment¹⁶² (Munslow 1997, 9). Both these intellectuals believe that the process of historical explanation is one of literary effect rather than literal meaning and therefore it is important to acknowledge history's literary and fabricated character. If history is a literary creation then the analysis of style, genre and narrative structure, more usually associated with fictional literature should also be applied to the understanding of the historian's sources and written interpretations (Munslow 1997, 9). It has already been established in chapters three to five of this thesis that as language is dialogic it is uncertain: its components have many second, or even more levels of meaning and signification. Therefore, if language is uncertain then the knowledge that we gain from it is indeterminate, making it impossible to construct truthful narratives as historical explanations. It is just as likely that the primary and secondary historical sources used by historians contain figurative devices such as metaphor, irony or allegory to hint at possible further meanings for their texts, which could have **manipulative** or **propagandistic** purposes. This is where the historian's personal ideological views and cultural situation may emerge.

162 A term coined by Paul Ricoeur that refers to the assembly of a series of historical events and characters into a meaningful narrative with a plot.

An important aim of this chapter is, therefore, to assess the credibility of the picture that César Vidal creates in his narrative of what ‘Arthurian Britain’ might have been like in terms of its culture, politics and religion. Vidal relies heavily on the aforementioned written medieval source texts for his depiction of *Britannia*¹⁶³ as a country on the verge of disaster in the face of the barbarian invasions. As will be argued in Chapter 7, he is keen to portray this scenario in order to further a hidden political and religious agenda in his narrative. However, historians claim that these early medieval texts contain so few dates, so few details of Arthur’s activities and whereabouts that a huge number of contradictory opinions have developed about his historicity. To assess whether Vidal’s depiction of the ‘Age of Arthur’ is supported by rigorous historical evidence, recent scholarly opinion regarding the trustworthiness of the medieval documents will be taken into consideration. From the 1970s onwards, university scholars began to challenge established ideas and concepts about the Arthurian tradition, culminating in David Dumville’s publication, which asserted that there was no proof that Arthur had ever been more than a mythical figure (Dumville, 1977). As Higham explains: ‘Now such experts have begun to read the texts of the early and central Middle Ages in very different ways, with the construction of histories and chronicles being viewed as politically and ideologically motivated, rather than the passive recording of events’ (Higham 2002, 5). Higham points to the importance of understanding ‘the shifting utility’ of the ‘concept’ of Arthur throughout the centuries in these different medieval texts:

This *idea* of Arthur has been one of the most persistent and powerful in Western culture over the last millennium, at least, and shows little sign now of abating. It has had successive transformations, each refashioned to the world picture projected by a particular author writing for a particular élite at a particular time. Each Arthurian manifestation reflects the way in which a particular author and his audience thought to fashion their own conceptions of the past, so as to benefit their own positioning in the present. (Higham 2002, 3)

¹⁶³ *Britannia* is the Roman name given to the island of Great Britain.

The analysis of the medieval sources in section two of this chapter will demonstrate that the figure of Arthur has often been used when societies have found themselves troubled by questions of ethnicity, group identity and nationality. When under a perceived cultural or political threat, the evocation of Arthur, his achievements and values, may contain a message of hope for that society in the present, which then has the potential to empower and manipulate the behaviour of its members. Viewed in this way, writing about Arthur may be considered a political and cultural act, undertaken to influence or persuade contemporaries to change the present. As well as examining the propagandistic function that Arthur and his exploits fulfil in the medieval documents this chapter prepares the terrain for Chapter 7, which addresses the purpose and nature of Vidal's utilisation of the figure of Arthur and other characters and plot lines from the legend in the novel.

1. *Artorius* and its Paratexts

Boldly standing out from the back sleeve of *Artorius* appears the claim that César Vidal has found the identity of the 'true historical Arthur' from whom the vast body of Arthurian legend has stemmed. It reads: '*Artorius* es la novela sobre la vida real del Arturo histórico contada por el enigmático personaje que mejor le conoció y que en los relatos míticos siempre figuró a su lado: Merlín'.¹⁶⁴ Vidal presents his reader with the 'evidence' for his claim in his author's notes. He commences with the assertion that the real Arthur was a descendant of a soldier named Lucius Artorius Castus and that his heritage was Roman and not Celtic. Vidal states that Lucius Artorius Castus arrived in Britain in AD 180 and was a centurion based in York. Allegedly, this famous and heroic centurion was the grandfather of Artorius, as evidenced in the text when Artorius and Merlin meet for the first time. Merlin asks:

- ¿Tienes algo que ver con Lucius Artorius Castus? – pregunté.
 Por un instante, el muchacho pareció desconcertado, pero
 enseguida la sonrisa volvió a dibujarse en su rostro.

¹⁶⁴ *Artorius* is the story about the true life historical Arthur told by the mystical character who knew him best and was always at his side in the mythical tales: Merlin.

- ¿No me digas que has oído hablar de mi abuelito? - interrogó con expresión burlona...

- ¿Quién no ha escuchado alguna vez hablar de las batallas que Lucius Artorius Castus libró contra los *barbari*? - respondí.¹⁶⁵

(Vidal 2008, 138)

The historian Thomas Green (2007, 182) points out that there is some evidence linking the name Lucius Artorius Castus to a historic figure, probably a native of Dalmatia (modern Croatia) or Italy, who became a *praefectus* of the *VI Legio Victrix* based at York. This seemingly concurs with the historical background information provided by Vidal. However, according to Green, this Lucius Artorius Castus is the only member of the *Artorii* family known to have visited Britain as there is only one recorded instance of this very rare personal name in Britain and, in addition, as pointed out by Malone and Malcor, ‘most significantly, the *gens Artorii* ¹⁶⁶ seem to have had a very limited and specific distribution, which did not include Britain’ (Malcor 1999 cited in Green 2007, 183; Malone 1924-5, 369). It should also be remembered that Lucius Artorius Castus, in spite of his reported distinguished military career, did not settle in Britain but returned to Dalmatia (Green 2007, 183). Therefore, Vidal’s claim that, ‘[l]a familia de los Artorii ya tenía una dilatada tradición de permanencia en Bretaña cuando nació nuestro personaje’¹⁶⁷ (Vidal 2008, 369) is erroneous.

Although historians such as Green and Higham are unconvinced that the historical Lucius Artorius Castus of the 2nd century is the ‘original’ Arthur they have suggested that it is not implausible that his name could have become attached to a cycle of folk-tales similar to those of the legendary Fionn mac Cumhaill. Known as the ‘Irish Arthur’, the figure of Fionn mac Cumhaill was well known in the Gaelic speaking areas of the British Isles (Ireland and Scotland) and had a vast legend associated with him

¹⁶⁵ ‘Are you related to Lucius Artorius Castus?’ I asked.

For a moment, the lad seemed worried, but suddenly a smile came back to his face.

‘Don’t say that you have heard about my grandpa?’ He questioned mockingly...

‘Who hasn’t heard at sometime or another about the battles that Lucius Artorius Castus fought against the *barbari*?’ I replied.

¹⁶⁶ The Artorius family.

¹⁶⁷ The Artorius family had already lived in Britain for a long time when our protagonist was born.

in the medieval period (Green 2007, 183, Higham 2002, 96). There is a marked likeness between these native legends, with their respective heroes undertaking adventures in a world of giants, magical animals and supernatural boar hunts (Green 2007, 8). Like Arthur, Fionn is credited as the victor of great battles but, as Green points out, it is his role as a figure of folklore and legend that came first and his historical associations come later. Green uses this comparison to illustrate the possibility that, probably in the Late Roman period, some fantastic tales might have attracted the Latin name of Artorius to their lead character, possibly on account of the heroic deeds of one Lucius Artorius Castus in the second half of the 2nd century (Green 2007, 182-6).

Littleton and Malcor (cited in Green 2007, 186-7) have argued that in post-Galfridian¹⁶⁸ romance several motifs can be discerned in the Arthurian legend that could be Scythian in origin. The Scythians were a people closely related linguistically and culturally to the Sarmatians who came from the Caucasus mountain region. Evidence exists that in AD 175 a large group of Sarmatians, hired by Emperor Marcus Aurelius, came to northern Britain to fight against the Picts. These Sarmatians were attached to the *VI Legio Victrix*, which has already been identified as having links with the centurion Lucius Artorius Castus. After their twenty-year term of service, the Sarmatians were not repatriated but accommodated in a military-like settlement at *Bremetennacum*, which is modern-day Ribchester in Lancashire, and documentation reveals that there was a troop of Sarmatian veterans there in the year AD 428 (Lacy 1996, 397). Littleton and Malcor have hypothesised that many motifs from the Sarmatian legends, formed around a hero called Batraz, bear similarities to those found in later Arthurian legend. For example, the worship of a sword embedded upright in the ground, the use of sacred cauldrons for burning hemp leaves to induce religious visions, and the presence of Shamans as tribal spiritual leaders are all said to have Arthurian parallels in the form of the Sword in the Stone, the Holy Grail and the magician Merlin (Lacy 1996, 397). However, whilst admitting the interesting connections, Green sees major difficulties with the theory as the comparisons it makes can only be seen as late additions to the Arthurian legend (Green 2007, 187). It would appear, therefore, that there is no evidence to believe that Lucius Artorius

¹⁶⁸ Post Galfridian refers to Arthurian literature written after Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia*.

Castus could have been the 'original' Arthur, nor could he have been any descendant of his. As the centurion Lucius Artorius Castus was active in the 2nd century AD it is impossible to claim, as Vidal does, that he could have been the grandfather of the Artorius of the novel. As most of the important Arthurian events are attributed to the late 5th century or early 6th century the number of years in age that would separate them makes this impossible.

In his author's notes, Vidal makes other claims about Artorius that are not historically accurate. For instance, he states: 'Artorius nació en Dumnonia, una población de Cornualles'¹⁶⁹ (Vidal 2008, 369). It is a well-documented fact that Dumnonia was a kingdom, not a village in Cornwall. There is a record of a 10th century poem that celebrates the valour in battle of Geraint, the king of Dumnonia, also called Dyfneint, and this is the kingdom from which Devon and Kernow (Cornwall) developed (Lacy and Ashe 2009, 21). Stafford also points out that Gildas, writing in c. 550 referred to the rulers of major kingdoms in Wales and the south-west, of whom '[t]hree can be identified with kingdoms which appear as major players in written sources of the seventh and eighth centuries, namely Dumnonia, Dyfed and Gwynedd' (Stafford 2009, 77).

The figure of Aurelius Ambrosius features prominently in *Artorius*. In the early historical sources, he is more commonly referred to as Ambrosius Aurelianus, although Geoffrey of Monmouth in his *Historia* also calls him Aurelius Ambrosius. He is the only 5th century Briton to be named in *De Excidio* where he is mentioned as a war-leader who launches a counter-offensive against the Saxon invaders of Britain (Lacy 1996, 7). In *Artorius* it is stated that Aurelius Ambrosius was the son of the Roman Constantine, whom the Britons had elected to the high military post of *Regissimus Britanniarum*¹⁷⁰ and who later comes to inherit this title himself when his father is murdered. Vidal's glossary of terms defines *Regissimus* as 'Cargo militar de la época bajoimperial'.¹⁷¹ Yet, in the *Notitia Dignitatum*,¹⁷² an important document of the 5th century that recorded all the civil and military offices in the Western Empire,

169 Artorius was born in Dumnonia, a village in Cornwall.

170 High King of the Britons.

171 A military post at the time of the occupation of the British Isles by Rome.

172 The List of Offices.

the high military offices of the Empire are listed as the *dux Britanniarum*¹⁷³ who commanded forts along Hadrian's Wall, the *comes litoris Saxonici per Britannias*¹⁷⁴ who had control of the forts along the southeast coast and the *comes Britanniarum*¹⁷⁵ who was in charge of the main field army. It is reasonable to expect that if the important-sounding post *Regissimus Brittaniarum* was in use at this time it might have been mentioned in the list. Added to this, Gildas in the *De Excidio* does not seem to suggest that Ambrosius was a king but refers to him simply as a Roman and a gentleman (Maund 2000, 19). Geoffrey Ashe points out that Ambrosius was not called king until the much later *Historia Brittonum*, and then again in Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia* thus casting doubts on the use of the term in the fifth and sixth centuries.

According to the plot of *Artorius*, at the end of his days, Aurelius Ambrosius is faced with a dilemma, a problem that he discusses with the physician Merlin:

-Voy a morir y mi descendencia... mi descendencia es una niña pequeña que no me puede sustituirme al mando de estas tropas... Físico... ¿quién va a sucederme? Dímelo...¹⁷⁶ (Vidal 2008, 227)

Merlin advises Ambrosius that he should adopt Artorius and make him the next *Regissimus* (Vidal 2008, 229), yet nothing like this is mentioned in any Arthurian source. This fabrication is important for the novel's plot as the young girl mentioned in the quote, Ana Ambrosia, becomes the mother of Medrautus who, as the direct descendant of Ambrosius, later lays claim to the title of *Regissimus Britanniarum*. Artorius is only given this title on condition that he promises that his successor would be of Ambrosius's line. Artorius's failure to comply with this promise leads to the encounter between Medrautus and Arthur at the Battle of Camlann, which is historically claimed to be Arthur's last battle.

¹⁷³ The Duke of the Britons.

¹⁷⁴ The Count of the Saxon shore.

¹⁷⁵ The Count of the Britons.

¹⁷⁶ 'I am going to die... my only descendant is a little girl who cannot take my place at the head of my army...Physician... who is going to succeed me? Tell me...'

Vidal also mentions in his notes that Arthur established his seat at *Camulodunum* (modern Colchester, Essex) in the winter of 491 (Vidal 2008, 371). None of the early sources mention that Arthur created a capital here. Colchester was, however, an important city and Roman Britain's first capital and *colonia*¹⁷⁷ that was developing as a model provincial city until Queen Boudicca, of the Celtic Iceni tribe, destroyed it. The city was then rebuilt, but because of its position on the East coast it remained vulnerable to attacks from Germanic seaborne raiders in the 4th and 5th centuries. Excavations of parts of the modern city of Colchester have revealed evidence of fire destruction and external attacks on the town in the fourth century, although it cannot have been completely destroyed as coin finds and graves testify to its continuous occupation in the early years of the fifth century. Snyder (1998, 144-6) suspects that Colchester must have passed into Saxon hands by the end of the 5th century therefore supporting Higham's assertion that in the 5th and 6th centuries there was an apparent cultural and geographical polarization of Britain between 'an economically undeveloped and comparatively thinly populated, predominantly Christian and 'British' west versus a comparatively well developed and well-populated 'Germanic' and predominately heathen east' (Higham 2002, 69). Therefore, it would have been very unlikely that any British warlord would consider the area around Colchester as a safe place for his seat. It is more plausible that if Arthur ever existed his area of activity would have been around Wales and the West Country.

Another claim made by Vidal is that Arthur had two wives, Leonor of Gwent and Guinevere. With regard to Leonor, Vidal says in his author's notes: 'Que ese matrimonio no duró resulta indiscutible aunque no es fácil saber si Artorius se divorció de ella... [o] si Leonor lo abandonó...' (Vidal, 2008, 372).¹⁷⁸ Yet, within the text, in an encounter between Merlin and Arthur, the reader is informed that Arthur wishes to divorce Leonor as she is a bad wife and has been unfaithful with one of his *equites*.¹⁷⁹ As Arthur explains: 'Es que no quiero una simple separación – me interrumpió Artorius-. Quiero el divorcio. Quiero volver a casarme. Quiero tener hijos

177 A Roman outpost established in a conquered territory in order to secure it.

178 There is no question that this marriage was short-lived although it is not easy to know whether Artorius divorced her... [o]r whether Leonor abandoned him.

179 Eques/Equites (pl) is Latin for knight.

que me sucedan como *imperator*' (Vidal 2008, 311).¹⁸⁰ This second marriage to Guinevere reveals Arthur's intentions of setting up his own dynasty, and acts as a plot device that accelerates the denouement of the novel and the clash between Arthur and Medraut. Yet, there is no evidence to support Vidal's claim that Arthur married twice. Lacy and Ashe (2009, 318-9) have pointed out that the inscription found on the cross that marked the grave of Arthur and Guinevere at Glastonbury by Giraldus Cambrensis referred to Guinevere as Arthur's second wife but this statement cannot be checked as the surviving drawing of the cross shows only one side of it and any reference to Guinevere was presumably on the other. It is also thought that this cross could have been a forgery, constructed by the monks, to keep the Arthurian legend alive and attract pilgrims and their monetary donations to the monastery to help rebuild it after a fire c.1184. Lacy and Ashe state that nothing is known about Arthur's first wife. A reference contained in the 13th century *Welsh Triads*, a work of bardic lore organised thematically into groups of three, mentions that Arthur was married three times and that the first of his wives was the daughter of Cywryd of Gwent, but not Leonor. Here, the three queens of Arthur are all named Gwenhwyfar: Gwenhwyfar daughter of (Cywryd) Gwent, Gwenhwyfar daughter of (Gwythyr) son of Greidiawl and Gwenhwyfar daughter of (G)ogfran the Giant (Coe and Young 1995, 74).

2. The Medieval Literary Sources: What They Tell Us About 'Arthurian' Britain and 'Arthur'

This next section focuses on the written literary sources that Vidal employs to paint an authentic picture of life in sub-Roman Britain. The history of Britain after the collapse of the Western Roman Empire has been perceived as a tumultuous era, one of invasion and domination by Germanic barbarians and threats to the Christian faith. However, archaeological research suggests that the settlements of the Germanic peoples in Britain were piecemeal, sometimes peaceful, and characterised by cohabitation and acculturation.

²¹ But I do not want a simple separation- Artorius broke in-. I want a divorce. I want to marry again. I want to have sons who will succeed me as *imperator*.

In *Artorius* the historical time scale is fixed early on when Merlin, the diegetic narrator, and mouthpiece of César Vidal, recalls the start of the problems that affected his homeland *Britannia* as beginning:

Quizá en el momento en que Roma se vio obligada a retirarse de Britannia porque el imperio se resquebrajaba y esta isla perdida en algún lugar de un mar norteño y frío no merecía los gastos que ocasionaba a unas arcas cada vez más exhaustas.¹⁸¹
(Vidal 2008, 10-11)

Historians consider the year AD 410 to be the date when Rome officially withdrew from the British Isles (Snyder 1998, 3). After the Roman conquest in AD 43 Roman culture extended through many parts. The island boasted many walled cities, temples and villas and a military network that stretched from the lowlands of Scotland to the southern coast of Wales. Historians believe that most Britons seemed to accept the changes brought in by the Romans as they heralded an era of stability, security and economic wellbeing for the population (de la Bédoyère 2013, 255). Merlin also speaks of the ease with which the Britons assimilated Roman culture. Many of the old British families intermarried with Roman families, adopting and adapting Roman deities to their own: ‘los *britannii* no habían tenido problema en descubrir a Hércules o a Mercurio detrás de sus propios dioses a los que siguieron adorando en su lengua nativa’ (Vidal 2008, 12).¹⁸² The use of Latin, the language of the Roman Empire and the Christian Church, was accepted and gradually became widespread after the conversion of some of the population to Christianity by missionaries who arrived on the island.

In AD 410 the Visigoth King, Alaric, launched an assault on Rome. This meant that troops had to be withdrawn from the outlying provinces of the Empire to aid Rome’s defence. Britain was left to defend herself against the barbarians to the north. Much of Hadrian’s Wall and its forts, which had been erected by the Romans to contain the

¹⁸¹ The moment when Rome was forced to withdraw from Britain because the Empire was crumbling and this forsaken island somewhere in the cold and northern sea did not merit the outlay from more and more depleted coffers.

¹⁸² The *britannii* had no problem in recognising Hercules or Mercury in their own deities whom they continued to worship in their native tongue.

barbarian Scots and Picts, had fallen into disrepair and the ease with which these barbarians were able to sack and pillage is described by Merlin in his following words:

Y como las desdichas nunca vienen solas, en cuanto que corrió la voz que los invasores del norte no tenían el menor problema en saquear, matar y violar, comenzaron a llegar a las costas de Britannia otros *barbari* que procedían del lugar donde nace el sol.¹⁸³ (Vidal 2008, 29-30)

The historical scenario with which Vidal presents his reader is that of a Britain on the brink of a very serious crisis: the threat of the destruction of British society from the invading barbarian hordes. But, on what historical evidence does César Vidal base these comments, is it reliable, and can it be used to present a solid case for the existence of a figure called Arthur who halted the invasion of the Germanic tribes?

There is very scant contemporary testimony to aid an accurate reflection of the events, personages and political and social climate of the early Middle Ages. The only contemporary native writers to whose documents historians have had access are the cleric Gildas and St Patrick, but Patrick's documents refer, mainly, to life in Ireland. In addition, there are only two recorded historical events that are considered to have reliable dates, the visit of St Germanus of Auxerre to Britain to fight Pelagianism 429,¹⁸⁴ and a chronicle entry for the year 441 from the *Gallic Chronicle* of 511 that confirms that 'to contemporary observers in Gaul, some significant portion of Britain passed into Saxon control in AD 441' (Snyder 1998, 37). In his author's notes, César Vidal does not refer to Gildas's work by name, as being one of his medieval sources for *Artorius*, but for many reasons, this vague document is relevant and essential to the analysis of the novel. Firstly, the *De Excidio* constitutes the basis of other much later rewritings of the Arthurian period such as the *Historia Brittonum* and the *Annales* and these are sources that are utilised by César Vidal. Thus, many of the

¹⁸³ And as misfortunes never come alone, as soon as word got around that the invaders from the North had no problem in pillaging, killing and raping, other *barbari* from the land of the rising sun began to arrive at the coast of *Britannia*.

¹⁸⁴ Pelagianism was a 5th century heresy that denied original sin as well as Christian grace.

events and people that are described in *Artorius* are first mentioned in Gildas's letter. Secondly, in the prologue to each chapter, Vidal shows evidence of being influenced by Gildas's lamentational style and rhetorical technique, in the sense that the narrator Merlin consistently berates the contemporary society in which he lives for having fallen prey to present-day evils.

2.1 The Intertexts

2. 1. 1 The *De Excidio et Conquestu Britanniae* (c.540)

Gildas's testimony concerning the political and cultural state of Britain under and after Roman rule has been considered important by historians because he was writing about the period in which he lived. As the title of his work suggests, his interests were concerned with the ruin and conquest of Britain by the invading German peoples. The *De Excidio* has three main sections: a 'historical' preface, which recounts events during the Roman occupation and then the subsequent withdrawal of the Romans from Britain, followed by 'a complaint' against the British kings and finally a 'complaint' against the British clergy (Snyder 1998, 43). The document contained a series of appeals to the Roman consul Flavius Aetius for help for Britain against the attacks from the Scots and the Picts from the north, which were ultimately ignored and resulted in an invitation by a British native leader to the Saxons to come to the island and help the Britons fight them. Gildas portrays the arrival of the Saxons as a terrible invasion of pagan barbarian hordes that devastated the cities of *Britannia* and reduced its people to ruin. What is more, he attributes this calamity to the wicked, sinful behaviour of the Britons and their godlessness.

However, Gildas does not mention Arthur anywhere in this document. The historic Battle of Mount Badon, to which Arthur's name has been linked as the great victor against the Saxons, is documented in Gildas's source but is not attributed to Arthur. Some modern scholars believe that Gildas was born in the same year as the Battle of Badon as in his testimony Gildas relates the Badon Hill victory to the date of his own birthday and the period of 44 years, which could mean that the battle took place 44 years before he was writing (Laycock 2009, 126). The date of Badon Hill is, however,

still a subject of great debate with possible suggestions ranging from AD 490 to AD 520 (Snyder 1998, 43). Ambrosius Aurelianus is the only Briton that Gildas names as taking part in the battle and some historians believe that this implies that the victor at Badon Hill could have been him. If Arthur had played a major part in the British resistance then surely we might expect Gildas to have mentioned him in this battle: if he had, then his historicity would not be in doubt.

After the Badon Hill victory, and the ensuing peace, Britain again fell into civil war and corruption, brought on by the crimes and feuds of the victorious British warlords themselves (Halsall 2013, 21), confirming further to Gildas that the troubles experienced in Britain were divine punishment for wrong-doings. Five of the contemporary rulers, to whom Gildas refers as 'tyrants', are criticised for their lifestyles of greed, sin and sexual excess: Constantine of Dumnonia, Vortipor of the Demetae, Cuneglas of Rhos, Maglocunus of Gwynedd and Aurelius Caninus, who was perhaps a lord over the area of Gloucester. It has generally been assumed that these warlords were active at the beginning of the 6th century as an entry in the *Annales* records Maglocunus as dying of the plague in AD 547 (Laycock 2009, 126). Yet, in spite of being contemporaries of Arthur, Arthur is not mentioned in relation to any of them.

Vidal's depiction of the events of this historical period closely parallels the details in Gildas's document and is in keeping with the idea that *Britannia* was an island plagued by barbarian invasions. The message that Merlin conveys is his belief that the arrival of the Saxons had begun to destroy the pillars of the great, civilised society that the Romans had begun to construct in *Britannia*. As he states in the prologue to chapter two the reason he believes that Rome had become such a great nation, and survived for so long, was because it insisted that its citizens obeyed the laws of their elders as contained in the *mores maiorum*, the unwritten code from which the Romans derived their social norms:

Una sociedad se sustenta sobre la base de apoyarse en la experiencia y el saber de los que vivieron antes. Fue esa conducta la que permitió sobrevivir a Roma durante siglos porque creían

*en la necesidad de respetar las mores maiorum, las costumbres de los mayores, y si existe algo especialmente dañino en el comportamiento de los barbari es su ansiosa lucha de erradicar todo lo que nos enseñaron y por edificar un nuevo mundo sobre las ruinas del antiguo.*¹⁸⁵ (Vidal 2008, 15)

The destruction of old customs, the disappearance of Latin, the threat to Christianity and the importance of remembering the Roman cultural legacy are therefore all matters of concern for the narrator Merlin and the Romano-British society in which he lives. Numerous examples in *Artorius* evidence the catastrophic picture Vidal elects to paint of Britain at the time. For instance, as also mentioned by Gildas, Merlin recounts the arrival of the Saxon leaders to the shores of *Britannia* at the invitation of a British leader:

Llegaron a Cantia tres navíos repletos de *barbari* mandados por dos hermanos que se llamaban Horsa y Hengist... Ni Horsa ni Hengist ocultaron que eran paganos y que creían en Wotan, un dios falso similar al Mercurio de los antiguos romanos¹⁸⁶ (Vidal 2008, 33-4)

It should be noted that Gildas did not name this leader, but simply refers to him as the 'proud tyrant', so here it is evident that Vidal is using the much later historical source of Bede, who in his 8th century work the *Historia Ecclesiastica Gentis Anglorum*¹⁸⁷ (AD 731) named the tyrant as Vortigern, and the Saxon leaders who were invited into the country are named as Horsa and Hengest. The name Vortigern is probably a title that meant 'over-king' in the British language, indicating that the Britons, like their Celtic counterparts in Ireland, had high kings who had superiority

¹⁸⁵ A society is able to survive on the basis of building on the experience and knowledge of those who have come before them. Behaving in this way allowed Rome to survive for centuries because the Romans believed in the need to respect the *mores maiorum*, the customs of the elders. If there is something especially harmful in the behaviour of the *barbari* then it is their eager struggle to eradicate everything that others have taught us and build a new world upon the ruins of the old one.

¹⁸⁶ There arrived in Kent three ships full of barbarians sent by the two brothers Horsa and Hengist... Neither Horsa nor Hengist hid the fact that they were pagans and believed in Wotan, a false God who was similar to the Mercury of the ancient Romans. (Wotan is another name for the Norse God Odin).

¹⁸⁷ The Ecclesiastical History of the English People.

over regional rulers (Lacy 1996, 496). Confusingly, César Vidal does not use the canonical name of the tyrant in *Artorius*. Instead he refers to him as Vortegirn which is the spelling also used by Geoffrey of Monmouth in his *Historia*.

Vidal presents the episode of the arrival of Horsa and Hengest as the beginning of the take-over of Britain by the Saxons and the start of the destruction of Romano-British culture and religion. Merlin states that having helped the Britons to a victory against the Picts at the River Humber, Vortigern then allowed more Saxons to enter the country, which led to greater demands for the granting of land to the Saxon 'allies' (Vidal 2008, 34). The historical validity of this encounter has now come into doubt, as have the identities of Horsa and Hengest, with current opinion being that Horsa and Hengest were Germanic horse-gods who became historicized by the 8th century and were believed to have played an important role in the Anglo-Saxon conquest of eastern Britain in the 5th century (Green 2007, 9). Even the existence of Vortigern, who occupies a considerable role in the legendary history of early Britain, is considered uncertain (Maund 2000, 17).

Therefore, based on events that cannot be proven to be historically true, Vidal suggests that in post-Roman Britain there was a rapid acceleration in the spread of paganism. This is manifest in the scene where Merlin describes the orchestration of the marriage of Hengest's pagan daughter Ronwen to Vortigirn, whom he now refers to as the *Regissimus Britanniarum*. The marriage, Merlin states, was the cause of the swift spread of paganism in *Britannia*:

En tan sólo unas semanas, las imágenes que adoraban los *barbari* se multiplicaron por la tierra de los *britanni* y comenzaron a aparecer por la corte personas que se jactaban de adivinar el porvenir recurriendo a ritos expresamente prohibidos en el Libro Santo.¹⁸⁸ (Vidal 2008, 37)

¹⁸⁸ In the space of only a few weeks the idols worshipped by the *barbari* multiplied throughout Britannia, and at court people began to appear, who boasted of being able to divine the future by means of rites explicitly forbidden in the Holy Book.

Merlin recounts that the *britannii* were so terrified by the destruction of their Christian churches and artefacts by the *barbari* that they either relinquished their faith or fled to the woods. Some attempted to carry on their Christian worship in secret and pass it on to their children but their clandestine actions were often betrayed by others or even members of their own family. The Christians were, '[a]cosados como fieras, perseguidos en ocasiones con perros de caza, siempre hambrientos y no pocas veces enfermos, lloraban preguntándose si el Señor los había abandonado' (Vidal 2008, 150).¹⁸⁹ When Merlin leaves the tutelage of his master Blastus and journeys through the towns and villages dispensing cures to the sick he remarks:

De repente descubrí que poco-en algunos casos verdaderamente nada - quedaba ya de la presencia de Roma en Britannia... Era como si la presencia creciente de los *barbari* hubiera ido desplazando la rica herencia de Roma de la misma manera que un terrible tumor va expulsando la vida de un cuerpo hasta causarle la muerte.¹⁹⁰ (Vidal 2008, 149)

But how much faith can be placed in the accuracy of this bleak portrayal of life in *Britannia* after the withdrawal of Rome's protection? Merlin's following words are designed to leave the reader with a negative and fearful image of the impact that the barbarian invasions were having on the Christian *britannii*: 'Sí, en aquellos tiempos, descubrí que los paganos eran mucho más poderosos de lo que yo hubiera podido imaginar' (Vidal 2008, 151).¹⁹¹ Yet, recent scholarship has challenged the notion that the Anglo-Saxon transformation of Britain came about as a result of tumultuous events and an abrupt collapse of Roman society. It is thought that after the Roman withdrawal, most of the Celtic tribes held on to the Roman lifestyle, especially in the westernmost areas of Britannia (Dark 2002, 105). Higham (2002, 64) also agrees,

¹⁸⁹ Hounded like wild beasts, sometimes pursued by hunting dogs, always hungry and often sick, they wept and wondered if the Lord had abandoned them.

¹⁹⁰ Suddenly, I discovered that little - in some cases nothing - remained of the presence of Rome in Britain... It was as if the growing presence of the *barbari* was displacing Rome's rich legacy just like a terrible tumour that keeps flushing life from a body until the moment of death.

¹⁹¹ Yes, in those times, I discovered that the pagans were much more powerful than I could have imagined.

suggesting that even two or three generations after the original arrival of the Saxons there was a strong well-educated Christian British élite that sought to maintain links with other Christian nations through an 'enhanced Latinity', as he describes it.

If Gildas's testimony falls short on its merits as an historical document, due to its vagueness of dates and rare identification of historical figures, could the importance of his writing be found in some other aspect? Snyder (1998, 66) suggests that Gildas's true motive for writing was not to chronicle the past but to deliver a religious polemic and that his 'historical' document could be the first signs of the Britons trying to express their ethnic or political identity as a race distinct from the Romans. Gildas, writing as a Briton and member of the élite Latin-writing element of society, saw the Germanic invasion as having a negative impact on his vision of his people and his fatherland or 'patria'. Snyder (1998, 65) sees this as the start of patriotic sentiment in Britain, or a sense of 'Britishness'.

In his document, Gildas constructs a sense of the Britons as a single united people whom he presents as the 'new' Israelites. Like the Israelites of the Old Testament who faced the destruction of Jerusalem by the Babylonians, he presents the Britons facing the same threats, but in their case from the invading Picts, Scots and Germanic tribes. Gildas blames the sins of the Britons for instigating the wrath of God in the form of the barbarian invasions in the same way as the prophet Jeremiah bemoaned the destruction of Jerusalem by the Babylonians as a punishment for the sins of the Israelites (Snyder 1998, 44). The idea behind Gildas's 'jeremiad' was that if the Britons could be helped to expel the foreigners then they would be able to mend their ways and renew their allegiance to God. This theme of God's retribution against a wayward nation will be explored further in Chapter 7.

2. 1. 2 *The Historia Brittonum* (c. 828-9)

In his author's notes, César Vidal refers to the *Historia Brittonum*, a document purportedly by a Welsh scribe called Nennius and reputedly written in Gwynedd, North Wales. It is considered to be the earliest source to possess a concept of Arthur as an historical figure. Yet, how much can we trust the historical information that the

Historia Brittonum provides, given that it is describing events that happened three hundred years before it was written and does it offer any proof for the existence of Arthur? The consensus amongst modern historians is that Nennius's *Historia* can no longer be seen as reliable evidence. Halsall (2013, 63) states that it puts together material from a string of sources, some of which can be identified, but almost none of which has any claim to reliability, and Coe and Young (1995) believe that it can only be treated as a source of importance for the 9th century itself and not for any earlier periods of history. So, what does the *Historia Brittonum* specifically tell us about the warrior Arthur? The chapter on Arthur is prefaced as follows: 'In that time the Saxons strengthened in multitude and grew in Britain' (cited in Lacy 1996, 342). In a passage often referred to as the Battle-List of Arthur, a series of battles are attributed to him, in which he is alluded to as the *dux bellorum*.¹⁹² Twelve battles are specified at nine sites, with four of them taking place at one single site, but Arthur's final battle at Camlann is not mentioned. Slightly more detail is given in the *Historia Brittonum* about certain battles, for instance the battle at the fort of Guinnion where Arthur 'carried the image of the Virgin on his shoulders' (cited in Padel 2013, 4), put the pagan English to flight and achieved a great slaughter of them through the assistance of Christ and Mary. This is taken to be indicative of an Old Welsh source for this part of the text because of the proposed confusion by the author of the *Historia Brittonum* of the Old Welsh word *iscuit*, meaning 'shield' with another Old Welsh word, *iscuid*, meaning 'shoulder'. Then there is the battle of Badon Hill, in which Arthur is absent in Gildas, but according to the *Historia Brittonum*, a struggle where he supposedly killed nine hundred and sixty enemies single-handedly. This exaggerated claim leads historians to believe that the entry can only be based on legend. Higham (2002, 155-6) also cast doubts on the authenticity of the battle list and both Halsall (2013, 67) and Padel (2013, 4) point out that the list supplies very little context, so that for the most part identification of where they took place is impossible. Indeed, for those battles for which a location has been suggested their widespread nature would seem to make it impossible that any one political leader could have commanded battles at all these places.

192 The 'Leader of battles', which implies that Arthur was not a king.

The *Historia Brittonum* was written to counter the use to which English authors had put Gildas's earlier work, the *De Excidio*, which had denigrated the Britons and put them in a bad light as a sinful and cowardly people (Higham 2002, 123). Higham reads the *Historia Brittonum* as a text written with explicit political aims and needs, stating that: 'It is important to realize that this is an ideological and rhetorical tract, which has been written both for, and against, particular ideas and specific groups' (Higham 2002, 121-2). In this respect, the medieval document shares the same propagandistic intentions that César Vidal has in his writing of *Artorius*. At the time the *Historia Brittonum* was written, Wales was facing a series of invasion attempts by the Anglo-Saxon Mercians who populated the present-day English Midlands area. It is thought that the patron of the work may have been King Merfyn of Gwynedd who commissioned the document to rally support for the continuing existence of a separate British people, a united race whose greatness and valour stretched back to the old kings of the Britons such as Cunedda, Vortimer, Arthur and Urien.

The idea of Arthur as the saviour of the Britons would almost certainly have come, suggests Higham, from the folkloric and legendary figure already known to the author of the *Historia Brittonum* before he began his composition. Green (2007, 215) states: 'The author wanted a very British and very Christian war-leader as an exemplar for good kingship in the ninth century' so his aim was to present Arthur as the British Joshua, paralleling the Joshua of the Old Testament, a universal victor who, with God's aid, triumphed over the pagan occupiers of the Promised Land (in Arthur's case, the Promised Land being Britain). This would then help to reassure the readers of the *Historia* that the Britons and their descendants, being peoples of the Lord, would one day repossess their lost lands, and the rulers of Gwynedd would be their natural leaders (Higham 2002, 143). It is important to ask why the author of the *Historia Brittonum* did not choose the figure of Ambrosianus Aurelianus, who does have historical credibility, to fulfil the role of the great heroic leader, but as Higham (2002, 155) explains his Romanity, as emphasised by Gildas in the *De Excidio*, precluded him from being the quintessential British hero that the author of the *Historia Brittonum* wanted.

César Vidal chooses to align his historical Arthur firmly with the victor of the Battle of Badon Hill and dedicates a whole chapter to the description of the battle which Merlin describes as an ‘espantosa carnicería’¹⁹³ (Vidal 2008, 267-273). Merlin, who has witnessed the event, makes the following statement:

¿Cuánto tiempo duró aquella batalla en la falda, en la cima y en torno a la colina de Badon? Debo insistir en que casi todo lo que se ha relatado o escrito sobre ella es abiertamente falso. Yo mismo he escuchado cómo algunos llegan a firmar que se prolongó a lo largo de toda la noche y que incluso duraba cuando la Aurora, valiéndose de sus dedos rosados, anunció el inicio del día siguiente. No fue así.¹⁹⁴ (Vidal, 2008, 272)

It is interesting that Vidal, via his narrator Merlin, informs his reader that nearly everything that has been written about the Battle of Badon is false. Perhaps at the back of César Vidal’s mind is the exaggerated claim by the unknown author of the *Historia Brittonum*, which speaks of the incredible death toll of barbarians by Arthur’s own hands. Vidal’s decision to omit this detail is possibly a deliberate choice in order to lend greater historical credibility to his own account.

In contrast to the martial exploits of Arthur, the *Historia Brittonum* also offers another concept of him, the Arthur of folklore. Appended to the document are references to a list of the *Wonders of Britain* (*Mirabilia*) of which two are associated with Arthur. One of them tells of a stone bearing the footprint of Arthur’s hound Cafall, left on it when hunting the pig Troyt (Padel 2013, 6). According to legend, if the stone were moved from the hilltop it would find its way back to the hill. The other wonder was a tomb in the Welsh Marches located by a stream called ‘Licat Amr’.¹⁹⁵ Amr is said to be the son of Arthur, who had been killed by Arthur and was buried in the tomb. The tomb was of variable length, never twice the same, and ‘I myself have

193 Atrocious slaughter.

194 How long did that battle last at the base, at the top and around the hill? I must insist that almost everything that has been told or written about it is wholly false. I myself have heard how some have come to write that it lasted through the night until the dawn, with her rosy fingers, heralded the start of the new day. That is not how it was.

195 The spring of Amr.

tested it', the author of the *Historia Brittonum* tells us (Padel 2013, 6). Higham (2002, 152) points out that the *Mirabilia* confirms that the folklore about Arthur was readily available to people in the 9th century and the story of the pig Troyt, which makes an intertextual link to the hunt for the magical boar Twrch Trwyth¹⁹⁶ in the early Arthurian story 'How Culhwch won Olwen' also demonstrates that early 9th century people were expected to have known this legendary Arthurian story.

2. 1. 3 The Annales Cambriae (c. 960-80)

The *Annales* is an anonymous Latin chronicle, which is considered to be the oldest surviving chronicle of Welsh affairs. It contains two references to Arthur, both of which have been claimed to support Arthur's existence as a historical figure. Firstly, a reference to the Battle of Badon, to which it gives the date of AD 516, and secondly, to the Battle of Camlann, which is an entry for the year AD 539. There are three recensions of the *Annales*, termed A, B and C, of which the A text is the earliest and exists as an insertion into a manuscript of the *Historia Brittonum* in the Harley manuscript.¹⁹⁷ For the Badon entry, Arthur is mentioned as carrying the image of Jesus Christ on his shoulders (or shield) for three days and three nights and that the Britons were victors in the battle (Padel 2013, 8). The second Arthurian entry of AD 539 speaks of the 'strife of Camlann in which Arthur and Medraut fell. And there was plague in Britain and Ireland' (Lacy 1996, 8-9). Yet, in spite of the source being the earliest known reference to Camlann and Medraut (or Mordred) it does not say that Arthur and Mordred were on different sides in the battle.

The events that lead up to and include the Battle of Camlann play an important part in the plot of *Artorius*. In his author's notes, Vidal places this battle in the year 514 and states: 'Tanto Medrautus como Artorius perecieron en la batalla'¹⁹⁸ (Vidal 2008, 373). It is essential for the plot of *Artorius* and its allegorical intertext that Arthur and Medrautus be cast as sworn enemies: it is also important that the character traits of Medrautus are associated with great treachery and underhandedness, as these are

¹⁹⁶ Welsh word meaning male pig

¹⁹⁷ A collection of manuscripts held in the British Library.

¹⁹⁸ Both Mordred and Arthur perished in the battle.

the negative qualities which César Vidal associates with the personality and political conduct of Spain's Prime Minister at the time, José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero, which will be discussed in Chapter 7. In *Artorius*, the ultimate treachery is hatched by Medrautus and his family when they form an alliance with the barbarians to gain military support for Medrautus's claim to become *Regissimus*:

A decir verdad, habían urdido un ingenioso plan para lograr que sus propósitos alcanzaran el cumplimiento más consumado y completo. Consistía aquél en establecer una alianza secreta con los *barbari* a los que Artorius había contenido durante años y, a la vez, en prometer a la gente más joven, la que tenía la edad de Medrautus, que todo sería más dichoso cuando el joven se ciñera la corona.¹⁹⁹ (Vidal 2008, 331)

However, many issues have also been raised regarding the validity of the *Annales* as a credible source. Firstly, they appear to have been created over four hundred years after the events that they are supposed to describe. As retrospectively compiled documents they could easily be added to or changed in their successive recopying which could make them even more unreliable (Stafford 2009, 24). Higham (2002, 201-2) has suggested that the author of the *Annales* knew the *Historia Brittonum* and heavily plagiarised the language of the text, which he believes relegates the *Annales* to the same unreliable category as the *Historia Brittonum* and Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia*. As Higham explains:

All are highly imaginative works, none of whose authors saw their prime task as the reconstruction of what actually happened in the distant past. Rather, in all cases then as now, the past was pressed into the service of the present and was

¹⁹⁹ To tell the truth, they had hatched an ingenious plan to make sure that their objectives were fully and consummately executed. That objective consisted in establishing a secret pact with the *barbari*, whom Artorius had kept out for years and, at the same time, promising the young people who were of the same age as Medrautus, that things would be better when the young man was crowned.

subject to the immediate, and highly variable, purposes of political ideology. (Higham 2002, 271)

As such, the authoring of the *Annales* may be considered a highly **manipulative** venture. According to Higham, the fact that the Battle of Badon is once again referred to in the *Annales* does not add any value to its historicity because of its obvious palimpsestic relationship with the *Historia Brittonum*'s account of the battle.

Once again, historians have underlined the importance of understanding the political context in which the *Annales* were written and for what purpose the figure of Arthur was intended in the text. The *Annales* were written in the middle of the Viking Age, in the context of a newly unified Anglo-Saxon England created under the House of Wessex. This was a difficult time for the Welsh, as they were losing control of their lands to their English neighbours. Higham (2002, 269) argues that the Arthur of the *Annales* is a metaphor for the contemporary ruler Owain, King of Dyfed, who could trace his maternal descent back to an obscure Arthur. The chronicler then conflated this figure with the Arthur extracted from the *Historia Brittonum*, developed to deliver a 'specific political message of immediate relevance only in the mid 950s when he was in danger of losing control of south Wales and central-western Wales and indeed his very life, to his cousins in Gwynnedd' (Higham 2002, 269). The *Annales*, therefore, adds a new layer of politically motivated development to the pre-existing rhetorical construct of Arthur as found in the *Historia Brittonum*. It is a necessary conclusion that its Arthur has no better claim to historicity than the one who had already been conceived over a century earlier.

3. The Epigraphic and Archaeological Evidence

The use of Latin in inscriptions found on tombstones, memorials, metal plaques, pottery, writing tablets and many boundary markers and milestones around western Britain also suggests that Latin was a living language in the 5th and 6th centuries over a wide area (Higham 2002, 64). Latin inscriptions on soldiers' tombstones have helped to establish the ethnic origins of the soldiers and the religions prevalent in Britain at the time. From other more general inscriptions historians have been able to

gain many social insights, for example, into tribal allegiances *Venedotis cives*,²⁰⁰ titles such as *rex*,²⁰¹ *protector*,²⁰² and occupations such as *magistratus*,²⁰³ *medicus*,²⁰⁴ *sacerdos*,²⁰⁵ and *presbyter*²⁰⁶ (Snyder, 1998, 48). The popularity of the cult of saints, the establishment of monasteries and a growing parochial structure all combine to show that the Christian religion remained strong in sub-Roman Britain. Higham suggests that the flourishing of Christian ideology may have been a response to the revival of paganism in the British lowlands which had come under Germanic influence and could be viewed as an attempt on the part of the Britons 'to define their own sense of group identity and nationhood and moral status as people of the Lord'. (Higham 2002, 64-6)

Archaeologists have also gained knowledge of sub-Roman society through the location and excavation of Anglo-Saxon cemeteries. Studies of the geographical patterns of Anglo-Saxon burial grounds suggest that Anglo-Saxon settlements expanded from the east to the west of the island. It has been argued that this spread showed an early 6th century hiatus, which fits in well with Gildas's statement that the British victory at Mount Badon brought fifty years of peace from foreign wars. Interestingly, most cemeteries have been found in areas considered to have been the most Romanized parts of Britain, near Roman roads and towns in present-day Kent, Essex, Sussex, Wessex and East Anglia, leading to the conclusion that Germanic colonization had followed the same path geographically as Roman colonization four hundred years earlier (Higham 2002, 69).

The excavation of Roman cemeteries suggests an overlap between the incoming Saxons and the Romano-British. Late Roman inhumation graves have offered up grave goods such as bronze trinkets, pottery and glass vessels but mixed in with these have been found shards of pagan Saxon pottery of the 5th century type (Johnson 1980, 141). The Saxons used both cremation and inhumation to dispose of their dead:

200 A citizen of Gwynedd.

201 King.

202 Defender or member of a corps of guards.

203 Magistrate.

204 Doctor.

205 Priest.

206 Elder or priest in Christian Church.

the ashes of those cremated were placed in hand-made urns and the bodies that were interred were often buried with grave goods or artefacts, ranging from metallic objects from costumes and jewellery to heavy weaponry. Finds of precious metals and fine metalwork within graves may also suggest that many of the deceased could have been significantly wealthy members of local or regional elites. As these cemeteries were not in the locations of ancient mines, archaeologists have proposed that the Anglo-Saxon communities must have relied on trade to acquire new supplies of silver to replace buried ornaments (Higham 2002, 68). Radford's excavation work at Tintagel found remains of imported ceramic pottery as did other finds on twelve other sites in Cornwall, Devon, Somerset and Wales in the late 1950s, indicating that at some stage between 450 and 600 these areas had all been occupied by people wealthy and important enough to exchange products with the Mediterranean world. Therefore, epigraphic and archaeological sources suggest that early post-Roman Britain was not such a dark and isolated time as Vidal and his literary inspiration Gildas have painted it. Neither was it a cultural wasteland as evidence shows that some parts of the island managed to hold onto much of its Roman legacy and the Christian religion. It should also be noted that, generally, the process of acculturation and adaptation is thought to have taken place peacefully.

Conclusion

The merit of César Vidal's novel *Artorius* as a serious attempt to create a biography of the historical Arthur from early medieval sources falls short on many counts. As Green has pointed out: 'Good history is written by those who first aim to understand the nature of their sources and their wider context before "mining" them for facts' (Green 2007, 10). This chapter has shown that Vidal's interpretation of his sources is poor, as he has failed to take into account the cultural, social and political contexts in which the medieval documents were produced.

He has also ignored the fact that even primary source textual evidence can be unreliable, as this also is the subjective narrative of historians and commentators, especially in the Middle Ages. As garnered from Higham's work, both the *Historia Brittonum* and the *Annales Cambriae* were ideological texts written both for and

against particular ideas and specific groups and, as such, are works of **propaganda**. Gildas's *De Excidio* was also a propagandistic work which later writers found easy to expand and adapt to their own particular agenda because, as Higham (2002, 57) says, the interpretation of the text was open, due to its dearth of a clear chronology, the absence of a reliable date of composition, and its lack of place names and personal names. In a similar vein, César Vidal has also capitalised on the adaptability of these medieval texts which has allowed him to promote his own opinions and interests, turning his novel into a propagandistic work that furthers his personal agenda.

Vidal has not succeeded in portraying a well-measured assessment of what the 'Age of Arthur' might have been like to live in, as he has chosen to ignore the recent archaeological and epigraphic evidence which suggests that what happened in sub-Roman British society was 'a transformation of Roman institutions and ideas, under the influence of native custom and Christianity' (Snyder 1998, 251). The end of sub-Roman Britain was a slow process, and not an abrupt disaster, as De la Bédoyère (2013, 268) points out. Once again, this **manipulation** of historical detail is used by Vidal to fit into his propagandistic agenda. The gradual transformation of sub-Roman British society is not the scenario that César Vidal wishes to portray for his allegorical comparison between *Britannia* and Spain in the 21st century. For this, he has to create a clash of cultures, and an immediate threat to the very fibre of British society that was signified by the barbarian invasions.

In general, César Vidal offers a very unbalanced view of the development of the Arthurian story. In his author's notes, he fails to mention the ideas put forward by respected contemporary historians such as Snyder (1998, 36) who says that Arthur might have been a composite character, albeit unreal: a mythological Arthur who came to be mistaken for a living person. Vidal ignores the likelihood that Arthur began life as a British folk-hero, as he appears in the Celtic sources, who goes off to the Otherworld and defeats giants and magical animals. This is the dominant concept of Arthur in medieval literature until the 12th century when Geoffrey of Monmouth wrote his pseudo-biographical history of Arthur, which assured his place in history as a martial warrior, king, and defender of Britain. It is only in the *Historia Brittonum* that we see Arthur being fitted into an historical format and possibly assigned the

achievements of others, such as the victory at Mount Badon, which Gildas appears to attribute to the British leader Ambrosius Aurelianus (Stafford 2009, 42). Therefore, it could be suggested that what César Vidal is offering his reader is historical fiction that could be based on fictional history, and what is more, he feels no authorial duty to bring this to his readers' attention anywhere in the paratexts.

A good historical novelist is always under pressure to present his reader with a convincing historical setting and a good plot, in which all loose ends are tied up. In delivering these elements for the readers' enjoyment there is no reason why a historical novelist should not treat real events artistically and incorporate the use of literary, poetic and rhetorical devices to enrich his narrative, but there is an onus of duty on the author not to pass off his artistic licence as truth. Authors have a responsibility to not present readers with deliberately false information about a historical character or period and to make clear how much they have invented. As will be argued in Chapter 7, the greater value of the novel *Artorius* and its worthiness of critical study is not as an exemplar of an exceptional historical novel but in its possible interpretation as an allegorical work, intended to be a moral, social and political critique of Spanish society in 2006. It will be suggested that the novel is yet another example of the legend being used as political **propaganda**, in this case, with the contemporary purpose of instilling fear and uncertainty into Vidal's readers with regard to the rapid, political and cultural changes which were being introduced by the then Prime Minister José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero.

Chapter 7: Propaganda and Manipulation in *Artorius*

Introduction

This chapter continues the common thread that weaves its way through this thesis, namely, the examination of the techniques that authors use in the process of text formation that can influence the reception of their narrative. An important observation made is that the intentional use of intertextuality is a technique whereby authors may seek to reinforce their ideological opinions: this may then influence or **manipulate** how the reader engages with the text. This has already been shown to be the case in *ERDSG* where the intentional placement of semantic markers that allude intertextually to other Spanish literary sources such as the Spanish ballad and Spanish poetry allow Paloma Díaz-Mas to raise questions and challenge ideological assumptions. The discussion that follows will demonstrate that in *Artorius* César Vidal uses this technique consistently and effectively in an attempt to communicate his particular views and ideological agenda. In this respect, *Artorius* continues an important characteristic of the Arthurian story as it has been rewritten and adapted throughout the centuries, namely, that it can be used as an agent of **propaganda** to deliver a particular message that is relevant for the age in which it has been written. This feature of the legend has often been employed by writers at time of political and cultural need when the symbolic evocation of the mythical Arthurian 'Golden Age' and the importance of the values of love, honour and a sense of duty towards one's fellow man and country are used to remind contemporary society that this ideal age may once again be achieved if people are prepared to change behaviour in some way.

In this chapter, it will be shown how the reader is manipulated through the performative dimension of the intertextual practice employed in *Artorius*. Performativity is a term that was coined in the 1960s by J.L. Austin, which suggests that language has the ability not just to communicate but also to bring about certain actions. A performative utterance consists of three parts: the locution or the words themselves; the illocutionary force or what the words are trying to communicate, and the perlocutionary force or the effect that said words have on someone else. An author's choice of vocabulary and syntax in a performative utterance, for example, the

use of repetition or of exhortative verbs such as to advise, recommend, encourage, or promise can have a profound effect on the message that the reader takes away. In *Artorius* one of the areas of the narrative in which this occurs most frequently is in the prologue or *exemplum* that precedes each chapter of the novel. Here the intertextual references made to the classics and the Bible have a performative dimension insofar as they perform reverence for established models of behaviour and traditions and are delivered in a wholly didactic tone, which is reminiscent of what is known in literary theory as the 'thesis novel' or *roman à thèse*.

In *Authoritarian Fictions* (1983) Susan Suleiman proposes that the *roman à thèse* is essentially an authoritarian genre, as it exists to affirm truths and absolute values in a non-problematic way (Suleiman 1983, 10-11). Its primary function is normally to seek to demonstrate 'the validity of some political, philosophical or religious doctrine' (Suleiman 1983, 7) and its main concern is to formulate and illustrate this doctrine throughout the narrative in an 'insistent, consistent and unambiguous manner' (Suleiman 1983, 10). The role of the narrator is an important factor in determining its authoritarian nature because narrators function not only as the source of the story they are telling but also as authoritative interpreters of the meaning of the story, claiming to speak with the voice of truth as they judge the ideas and actions of the principal characters. An essential part of their endeavour is to privilege one ideological system over another and in so doing affirm one system as being correct whilst discrediting all others (Suleiman 1983, 71). A number of rhetorical techniques are employed to impose the author's 'truth' on the reader. Most notably these are the use of semantic redundancy, which is the provision of information that is expressed more than once, and the *exemplum*, which is a short story or narrative employed to explain a doctrine or emphasise a moral point with the aim of imposing an action on the reader. In the *exemplum*, excess or redundancy serves as a guarantee that the narrative's meaning will be understood without any ambiguity. Unlike the postmodern novel, the *roman à thèse* does not interest itself with the emergence of a plurality of ambiguous meanings, preferring to make its message clear and therefore delimit the range of interpretation allowed to the reader. According to Suleiman, the *roman à thèse* manifests an extreme example of the tendency to teach or instruct

which lies in the earliest origins of the novel: so strong is this tendency that it verges on **propaganda** (Suleiman 1983, 3).

Suleiman points out that the *roman à thèse* will often flourish in nationalist contexts, or at highly polarised political moments, or when societies experience periods of sharp social and ideological changes (Suleiman 1983, 16). Therefore, it could be a form of narrative that arises in response to the human need for certainty, stability and unity in uncertain times (Suleiman 1983, 10). Suleiman's model will, therefore, be used to support the contention that *Artorius* was written as an allegorical critique of the moral, social, religious and political state of Spanish society in 2006, a time when César Vidal perceived a threat to traditional Spanish society. This hypothesis was first postulated by Carlos Sanz Mingo in 2012 in his paper entitled 'From the Middle Ages to the future: The Arthurian legend and its transcultural value', where he indicated several passages from the novel that could be read allegorically as an indictment of the Spanish socialist government of 2004-2008 and the agenda of reforms it brought in. Building on Sanz Mingo's ideas, the chapter will proceed to offer further textual examples from *Artorius* that will bolster this hypothesis. Suleiman's model will be used to analyse the structure of the text itself and establish to what extent it fits the genre of the didactic and propagandistic form of the *roman à thèse*. It will be suggested that *Artorius* shares many traits with the *roman à thèse* but deviates from the norm in that its plot has been removed to the past and does not coincide with the historical moment of crisis (i.e. Spain in 2006) that prompts its writing. Therefore, *Artorius* could be described as a thesis novel in the guise of a historical novel.

However, before proceeding with the textual analysis it will be essential to examine the political and social context of Spain in 2006, the changes that were being brought in during the first term of the Socialist government and their reception by the Spanish general public. Importantly, it will be demonstrated that these changes conflicted with the social and religious values of the extreme right-wing and fundamentalist Christian, César Vidal and those like him. Following this, a profile of César Vidal will be presented. This has been done by collating evidence from various sources that reveal his personal values and opinions. The information collected will support the

hypothesis that *Artorius* is a vehicle that allows Vidal yet another platform to propagate his critical views of the Socialist party and its policies. Linked to this, the association between extreme political convictions and a belief in conspiracy theories will come into the field of study, and an assessment will be made as to whether judged by these criteria, César Vidal's views border on the paranoid and conspiratorial.

1. Prime Minister José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero's First Term of Office 2004-8

In 2006, when *Artorius* was first published, José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero was two years into his first term. The Spanish public had felt let down by the conservative government of José María Aznar after being misled by misinformation about the perpetrators of the March 11th terrorist attacks.²⁰⁷ Before these events, few people thought that Zapatero would win the election. His party, the PSOE,²⁰⁸ had lost much of its credibility in the 1990s, due to scandals, corruption cases, and the alleged assassinations by members of the Interior Ministry of presumed collaborators of ETA.²⁰⁹ Therefore the odds of a socialist victory in 2004 were slim. A popular theory in Spain at the time was that Zapatero suspected he would not win the elections, so he decided to 'go out on a limb and construct an idealist Socialist project that would probably never be implemented, but that could recharge the PSOE' (Encarnación in Field 2011, 29). Many of Zapatero's detractors believed that the bombings, and the probability that they had been carried out by an al-Qaeda cell, helped swing the election in favour of the PSOE as the conservative government was blamed for the attacks due to its involvement in the Iraq war.

196 Three days before the general election called for March the 14th there were bomb blasts at three separate Madrid railway stations. Ten bombs exploded in ten minutes leaving one hundred and ninety-one people dead, one thousand wounded and a further fourteen died in hospital several days later. The presiding government blamed the horrific event, now known as 11-M, squarely on ETA but very quickly clues began to emerge that pointed to the likelihood that the perpetrators of the atrocity were linked to Al-Qaeda. Later judicial investigations showed that a group of Islamic extremists had ordered the attack in retaliation against Spain's participation in the Iraq war (Campillo 2004, 352-3).

208 *Partido Socialista Obrero Español* (Spanish Socialist Worker's Party).

209 ETA or *Euskadi ta Askatasuna* is a terrorist organization formed in 1959, which wanted to create an independent homeland in Spain and France's western Pyrenees. On October 20th 2011 ETA declared an end to armed activity.

Zapatero's first term saw him take political risks, which showed his audacity and originality but also earned him many enemies along the way. Campillo (2004, 22) speaks of Zapatero's 'descarado oportunismo, su empecinamiento en mantener a toda costa el poder y la firme determinación de no contaminarse con derrotas'.²¹⁰ His policies encountered fierce opposition from the conservative media, the Catholic Church and politicians on the right who variously nicknamed him 'zafio',²¹¹ or 'Bambi', referring to his meek manner and doe-like eyes and his lightweight political persona. The Spanish newspaper *El Mundo* and the conservative Catholic radio station COPE,²¹² for which César Vidal worked at the time, even tried to discredit Zapatero's government by linking it with a plot by national security forces to leave Spain vulnerable to a terrorist attack by Islamists in order to ensure a Socialist victory in the March elections. Junquera (2014) states that the former conservative *Partido Popular* (PP)²¹³ Prime Minister José María Aznar told investigating committees at the time that he was convinced that if he had called the elections on March 7th instead of the 14th the attacks would have taken place on the 4th, because he believed that the attacks were not just aimed at killing people but throwing the elections. Historically, this tendency to seek answers in conspiracy theories at times of confusion has been a familiar phenomenon in many countries (Moynihan 1985, 109). Hofstadter (cited in Moynihan 1985, 108) has labelled this distorted and delusional way of viewing the world as the 'paranoid style'. It is characterised by excessive suspicions, exaggeration of facts and unjustified leaps of imagination, which are then expressed in elaborate theories of conspiracy. A belief in conspiracy theories, he suggests, helps people to make sense out of a confusing reality, rationalise their present difficulties and relieve their feelings of powerlessness. Several years after the 11M attacks it was evident that the idea of a conspiracy theory had still not gone away in certain Spanish circles. In a memorial mass, held on March 2014 for the bomb blast victims, Cardinal Antonio María Rouco Varela,²¹⁴ Archbishop of Madrid, claimed

210 His barefaced opportunism, his willfulness in holding on to power at all costs, and his firm determination not to be affected by defeat.

211 Coarse or uncouth.

212 *Cadena de Ondas Populares Españolas*. It is a private right-wing commercial Spanish network owned by a series of institutions within the Spanish Catholic Church.

213 The People's Party.

214 During his ministry Cardinal Antonio Rouco Varela was a great promoter of the Catholic family, and a fervent opponent of same-sex marriage and abortion.

that, '[h]ubo alguien, hubo personas, que con una premeditación escalofriante estaban dispuestas a matar inocentes, a fin de conseguir oscuros objetivos de poder'²¹⁵ (Martínez-Fornés 2014). Some observers interpreted this as a veiled reference to conspiracy theories involving a plot between the Socialists and the Spanish police to cover up the true authors of the attacks in order to secure the election.

2. Zapatero's Social Reforms

Underlying Zapatero's progressive legislative agenda was his belief that Spanish democracy would be improved by enhancing the social rights of Spaniards (Hedgecoe 2011). This agenda hinged on what Zapatero termed as *socialismo ciudadano*²¹⁶ (Sánchez-Cuenca 2012, 17) under which he envisaged equality for everyone under the law and a restoration of civic virtues such as austerity, humility, compromise, honesty and generosity. Through legislation aimed at reducing discrimination, promoting equality and extending civil rights Zapatero's administration planned to address the areas in which Spain had traditionally been lagging behind, namely, gay rights, women's equality, and the challenges of immigration and regionalism. Much of his planned agenda contradicted almost every tenet of Catholic doctrine and was disapproved of by Pope John Paul II (Valenzuela 2007, 139). Seemingly unperturbed, in 2006, Zapatero abolished the showing of religious symbols in public places, restructured state financing for the Church, and passed a new education law which removed religion as an obligatory subject in schools, thereby shelving a law passed by the previous administration: instead optional religious courses were proposed that integrated religion into the curriculum as a cultural topic (Sánchez-Cuenca 2012, 33-46). Another early incentive in Zapatero's first term was to fulfil his promise to withdraw Spanish troops from Iraq and this was then swiftly followed by a number of radical social policies which will now be looked at in more detail, as reference will be made to them in the section of this chapter that deals with the textual analysis of *Artorius*.

²¹⁵ There was somebody, or some people, who were willing to kill the innocent with cold calculating premeditation, in order to obtain their dark objectives of winning power.

²¹⁶ Citizen's Socialism.

2.1 *Ley del Aborto* 2004²¹⁷

In 2004, Zapatero appointed eight women to his cabinet, including a female deputy prime minister, meaning that half of the members of his cabinet were now female (Field 2011, 9; Thomson 2014, 415). The same year saw a new law passed to protect women from domestic violence and the implementation of plans to improve the rights of women by reforming the *Ley del Aborto* of 1984, but these proposals were not approved until 2010 during the course of Zapatero's second term. In 1936, during the Spanish Second Republic (1931-9), abortion had been legalized in Republican-controlled areas of Spain, however, this freedom was short-lived as from 1938 onwards this liberal abortion law (along with the divorce law and civil marriages) were removed from the statute books in the zones increasingly taken over by the Nationalists. General Franco, supported by the Catholic Church in this action, condemned the aforementioned laws as being pro-communist, anti-Nationalist and against Spanish sentiments and attitudes (Twomey 2013, 63).

During Franco's era and up until 1984 the termination of a pregnancy had been considered a criminal act in Spain. Under the terms of the 1984 act, abortion was allowed on only three accounts: rape, serious deformity of the foetus, and when the mother's mental or physical health was threatened. Zapatero's proposed new reforms were more liberal in that they intended to give women the legal right to choose abortion on demand up to fourteen weeks of pregnancy, or up to twenty-two weeks in cases where the mother's health was at risk or the foetus showed signs of serious deformities. A controversial clause also contained in the new proposals advocated the rights of young women between the age of sixteen and seventeen to seek a termination without parental consent. These new laws came into force on the 5th of July 2010. The topic of abortion polarised public opinion in Spain at the time and many conservative Catholics condemned the new reforms. In December 2011, Prime Minister Mariano Rajoy abandoned a controversial bill that would have outlawed nearly all abortion procedures in Spain.

²¹⁷ The Abortion Act 2004.

2. 2 Ley del Divorcio 2005²¹⁸

Another of Zapatero's proposals was to update the *Ley del Divorcio* of 1981. Under the old law, couples had to be married for a year before they were able to ask for a legal separation and were also required to cite causes for their petition for divorce. Zapatero's proposed change speeded up the time it took a couple to complete the divorce process, eliminating the need for them to be physically separated for a period before proceedings could begin. This was much less costly and couples could file for divorce as early as three months after their marriage without being separated. Under the new law there was no need to cite causes for divorce and in cases where children were involved, if it were shown that there was no threat of violence in the family then couples were granted shared custody of their offspring. The facilitation and expedition of the separation and divorce procedure was a measure that was intended to help address the wider problem of gender violence in Spain. In 2005 there were more than fifty cases of violent deaths of women at the hands of their partners in Spain (Vives-Cases 2006). Zapatero's new policy on gender violence passed in 2004 and made law in 2005 aimed to extend and protect the civil rights of the vulnerable and abused partner (usually a woman).

The Spanish public generally welcomed the new divorce law of 2005, but it received a hostile reaction from Conservative groups and the Catholic Church. In a massive pro-marriage and pro-family demonstration in Madrid in 2007, Madrid's Archbishop, Antonio María Rouco Varela spoke of the marriage between a man and a woman as being a 'valor insustituible... célula... vital de la familia'²¹⁹ (Cano, 2007). He believed that the new law went against the Declaration of Human Rights, which recognised and established the family as the natural nucleus of society, and as such it should be protected by society and the state. Nevertheless, according to the National Institute of Statistics 126,952 divorces were registered in Spain in 2006, a 74.3% increase on the previous year. The sharpest rise was seen in divorces between those who had been married for less than a year and the new law became known as the *divorcio exprés* (Hamilos 2007).

²¹⁸ The Divorce Act 2005.

²¹⁹ A value impossible to replace... the vital... nucleus of the family.

2.3 *Ley del Matrimonio Homosexual 2005*²²⁰

On the 30th June 2005, the Spanish Parliament approved Law 13/2005, which amended the Civil Code to permit same-sex marriage. This law was the culmination of a series of demands based on a long struggle for partnership rights from social movements on the left (Platero 2007). Under the Franco regime, homosexuality was considered a crime and a mental disease punishable by prosecution, imprisonment or institutionalization (Pingree 2005). Franco's death in 1975, the transition to democracy, and the cultural movement *La Movida*, which grew up in Madrid and other large Spanish cities at the time, heralded the starting point for gay rights and the decline of public hostility towards homosexuality. November 1995 saw the revocation of the *Ley sobre Peligrosidad y Rehabilitación*²²¹ of 1970, under which the dictatorship had had the power to punish homosexuals by compulsory re-education programmes which would allow them to re-enter society and participate in a 'fuller social life' and the Public Scandal article 431 of the Penal Code which gave the police the power to arrest anyone involved in 'immoral acts'.

The PSOE government of 2004 had set equality for the sexes as a priority and Zapatero saw the initiative of the right to gay marriage as finally putting into practice the civil rights that the 1978 constitution had promised. In his own words, he considered the law to be an, '[e]stricto cumplimiento de un compromiso electoral [para crear u]n país más decente porque una sociedad decente es la que no humilla a sus miembros'²²² (Sánchez- Cuenca 2012). Actually, by 2004 some form of civil union was already in place in most of the autonomous regions of Spain but Zapatero wanted to go beyond a formal legal contract and recognize gay marriage as indistinguishable from any other marriage. Under the new law, gay couples were given equal rights to inheritance, residence, tax benefits, divorce rights and were allowed to adopt children. Spain was the third country in the world, behind Belgium and the Netherlands, to adopt this policy.

²²⁰ The Same-sex Marriage Act.

²²¹ The Dangerousness and Social Rehabilitation Act.

²²² A strict fulfilment of an electoral promise [to create a] more decent country because a decent society does not humiliate its members.

In Catholic Spain, this was a politically bold move and the reaction of some sections of the Church and right-wing commentators was hostile. Both groups promoted the idea of the traditional family as the true source of citizenship, portraying LGBT rights, along with divorce and feminist struggles as a source of instability and an attempt to destroy Spanish society. The *Foro Español de la Familia*²²³ presented the government with 500,000 signatures in defence of marriage and the family (Gutiérrez 2011). The Senate, where the conservative *Partido Popular* held the majority rejected the bill, but the final say on legislation rested with the 350-seat Congress of Deputies, which approved the measure by a vote of 187-147 (Thompson 2014, 415). The policy had the backing of 66 per cent of the Spanish public, according to a survey published by the CIS (Sánchez-Cuenca, 2012).

2. 4 *Ley de la Extranjería* 2005²²⁴

Another major issue that posed a challenge for Zapatero's government was large-scale immigration, especially illegal immigration (Richards in Field 2011, 103). Between 2000 and 2008 some five million immigrants settled in Spain (8.7% of the population), which made Spain the biggest recipient of immigrants in the EU at the time (Royo 2009, 62). The spectacular increase in immigration was linked to the expansion of its labour market as the country had enjoyed a long cycle of economic growth, which had generated a strong demand for immigration and cheap labour. Marginalised, vulnerable and concentrated in the most precarious and least skilled occupations in Spanish society, the immigrant's social situation contrasted markedly with that of the indigenous Spanish populations and some believed that the immigrants had begun to threaten the cohesion of Spanish society (Richards in Field 2011, 104). In 2005, the Spanish National Institute of Statistics (Instituto Nacional de Estadística) placed the official number of immigrants in Spain at 3.5 million people, equivalent to over 7% of the total population.²²⁵ During 2005 the foreign population grew by 11.1% with an increase of only 0.5% for the native population, leading to the hardening of public attitudes towards immigration. By the start of 2006, the size of

223 The Family Forum of Spain.

224 The Immigration Act 2005.

225 <https://www.eurofound.europa.eu/publications/article/2005/spain-the-normalisation-of-immigrants-in-2005>

the foreign population stood at 4.14 million with 36.2 per cent from Africa, 16.6 per cent from elsewhere in Europe, and 5.3 per cent from Asia (Richards in Field 2011, 93).

When Zapatero became Prime Minister a million illegal immigrants were working in Spain with no civil rights or access to social services. Because of the worries of the possible effects of immigration on high unemployment and on Spain's developing welfare institutions, Zapatero's first government was forced into developing initiatives to deal with this. The focus of Zapatero's new law on immigration was to tighten government power of the resident illegal population (such as the right to deport anyone convicted of illicit activities) rather than tightening the border controls. His policy was to regularise the status of the so-called *sin papeles* ²²⁶ and for those willing to admit they had entered the country illegally the PSOE government offered amnesty and full Spanish citizenship. As a result of this liberal policy, in 2006, thousands of sub-Saharan migrants in *cayucos* ²²⁷ arrived in desperate conditions in the Canary Islands and also used the North African Spanish enclaves of Ceuta and Melilla as a stepping stone into mainland Spain at the Andalusian coast (Valenzuela 2007, 96). By August 2006, 15,000 migrants had arrived, more than trebling the entire total for 2005 (4,715). The autonomous Spanish regions complained that they were unable to cope with the influx and called on the EU and national government to solve the crisis.

By 2006 there were signs that the Spanish public was becoming preoccupied with the immigration problem and attitudes hardened. This is confirmed in the findings of *Análisis Sociológicos, Económicos y Políticos*²²⁸ (ASEP) who from 1997 to 2007 carried out significant surveys on the attitudes towards foreigners in the Spanish population over the age of eighteen. Three different periods were chosen for the study: 1997-1998, 2003-2004 and 2006-2007. In the final period, when immigration was high, the process of immigrant legalization was coming to a close, and the high point of economic expansion had been reached, the percentage of Spaniards who thought that

²²⁶ without papers.

²²⁷ flimsy canoes.

²²⁸ Sociological, Economic and Political Analyses.

there were too many foreigners in the country was 61.9 per cent as opposed to 26.8 per cent in 1997-1998 and 46.6 per cent in 2003-2004. The feeling that foreigners posed a cultural and economic threat to Spain also increased from 24.3 per cent in the earliest survey to 36.5 per cent in 2006-2007 (Checa Olmos, Arjona Garrido 2012, 39-53), although these percentages were comparatively low in European terms and there was no far-right anti-immigrant party in Spain. During this period Zapatero's government was blamed for fomenting rather than diminishing immigration and politicians on the right began to accuse Zapatero of turning Spain into a paradise for illegal immigration.

2. 5 Ley de la Dependencia 2006²²⁹

One of Zapatero's most important additions to his programme of social reforms was the passing of the above law, designed to provide the fourth pillar of the Welfare State and complete the other three pillars of Health, Pensions and Education. The law was intended to provide economic and personal assistance to people with high degrees of dependency on others because of physical or mental impairment. Traditionally, the Spanish Welfare State had always left this sort of care in the hands of the family but it was thought that the creation of this network might have important repercussions in generating more employment and impact on the the Spanish GDP. In July 2007, instead of investing in nursery education, Zapatero opted for a payment of 2,500 euros for all new-born children irrespective of family income, which was referred to as the *cheque bebé*.²³⁰ This measure had not been included in his electoral programme and Zapatero was consequently criticised for taking decisions without thinking them through and not consulting experts (Sánchez-Cuenca 2012, 37). Politicians on the right and some on the left felt that this was an expensive and unjust policy, occasioning the leader of the PP Mariano Rajoy's comment: '[e]l Gobierno acabará ofreciéndonos un chalé en el Caribe'²³¹ (Gutiérrez, 2011).

229 The Dependency Law.

230 Newborn baby allowance.

231 The government will end up offering us a villa in the Caribbean.

2. 6 *Ley de la Memoria Histórica 2007*²³²

In the 1970s, Spain underwent a successful transition from dictatorship to democracy. The early days of the Transition saw the memory of Franco and his supporters still preserved in the many statues and streets that glorified their names. The politicians of the Transition period agreed that the best way to secure a successful and peaceful transition to democracy would be to leave the past behind in a 'pact of forgetfulness' referred to in Spanish as *el pacto del olvido* (Mathieson 2007, 11). This refusal to rake over the past meant that punishment was not sought for the crimes of the Franco regime and no attempts were made to seek justice for the Republican victims or to honour their memory. The new government in the 1970s did not wish to relate the emerging democracy with the constitutional Republic, as they feared a perceived link in the public's mind between Republicans and the Civil War, which could revive the conflict between the 'two Spains' (López Lerma 2011, 4). Therefore, memories were repressed and no members of the fascist regime were ever called to account or punished for their actions (Mathieson 2007, 11).

At the end of the 1990s, grassroots organizations such as the *Asociación para la Recuperación de la Memoria Histórica*²³³ (ARMH) pressurised to know the truth about the atrocities of the Civil War and to gain appropriate reparations and historical recognition for what had happened. Demands were made by the group to recover the approximately 30,000 bodies of those buried in common graves, honour their memory and restore their dignity. At the time, the conservative government, led by Prime Minister José María Aznar (1996-2004), opposed any debate regarding the recovery of historical memory precisely for the reasons mentioned above, namely that it would initiate the process of opening up old wounds.

Finally, in 2006, and partly in response to the ARMH's demands, Zapatero's newly elected government presented a bill to recognize the rights of those who suffered persecution or violence during the Civil War. Zapatero had also a personal interest in getting this bill through the *Cortes* as his grandfather, Captain Juan Rodríguez Lozano

²³² The Historical Memory Law.

²³³ Association for the Recovery of Historical Memory.

of the Republican army, had been executed by firing squad by the Nationalists during the Spanish Civil War (Campillo, 2004, 47). The *Cortes* approved the bill on October 31, 2007. López Lerma (2011) lists the following economic, legal and symbolic measures that the law established:

the declaration of the illegitimacy of Franco's courts and legal sentences (article 3); economic compensation for different categories of victims (articles 5-10); assistance to private citizens for locating and identifying the bodies that remain in unidentified graves (articles 11-14); banning of symbols, monuments, and the glorification of Franco and his regime from buildings and public spaces (articles 15-16); the creation of the Centre of Documentation of Historical Memory in Salamanca; and maintaining and developing the General Archives of the Civil War and the private right to access them (articles 20-22). (López Lerma 2011, 10)

The law also reaffirmed the 'obligation to protect each citizen's right to his or her personal and family memory as an expression of democratic citizenship' (López Lerma 2011, 10). The fear held by the *Partido Popular* that the policy might do more harm than good and destabilise the nation did not dissuade 54% of the public from supporting the idea of 'recognising the victims of the Spanish Civil War and the Franco dictatorship' (Encarnación 2009 cited in Field 2011, 33). The current Spanish socialist government under the leadership of Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez scheduled the exhumation of General Franco's remains from the mausoleum in the *Valle de los Caídos*²³⁴ for June 2019 (Cué 2019). The operation finally commenced in October 2019.

²³⁴ The Valley of the Fallen.

2. 7 The Reform of Autonomy Statutes²³⁵

Other socialist measures that inflamed enemies on the right included Zapatero's response to the demands made on the government by peripheral nationalism. In 2004 the regional Basque parliament unexpectedly approved the *Ibarretxe* Plan, which would allow the Basque territories to decide for themselves in a referendum whether they wished to have a free association with Spain on an equal footing and with a right to self-determination. This caused a mood of national anxiety and threw the government into a state of crisis. Zapatero condemned the *Ibarretxe* plan as unconstitutional due to its proposal to 'transform the Basque Country into a state freely associated with Spain and its recognition of the right to self-determination and therefore deemed to exceed the limits of the constitution' (Field 2011, 12). Therefore, a pact was forged with the opposition *Partido Popular* to block it. But in a historic gesture, Zapatero also engaged voluntarily in a debate with the Basque president and author of the plan and invited him to the *Moncloa* in Madrid for discussions, offering to negotiate a new statute of autonomous rights for the Basque country. This eagerness to pursue a strategy of dialogue and policy of *convivencia*²³⁶ earned Zapatero even more criticism from the right. Zapatero was criticized for giving in to ETA and accused of being prepared to give them everything that they wanted: 'el referéndum de autodeterminación, la incorporación de Navarra a Euskadi, la ampliación del País Vasco al sur de Francia, la libertad de todos los presos etarras...' ²³⁷ (Valenzuela 2007, 50).

In 2006 Zapatero returned to the question of the reform of the *Estatuto de Cataluña*²³⁸ saying that he would accept demands for more autonomy if they were approved by a majority of the Catalanian parliament. The risks of making good that promise soon became evident when Catalonia replied to his offer with a series of demands that directly challenged the central government's constitutional authority

235 These are organic laws that outline the policy functions and financial resources of the Spanish regions and define their relationship with the state.

236 Living together.

237 The referendum for self-rule, the incorporation of Navarra into Euskadi, the extension of the Basque country to the south of France and freedom for all ETA prisoners.

238 The Statute of Autonomy of Catalonia provides Catalonia's basic institutional regulations under the Spanish Constitution of 1978.

over the north-eastern region of Spain that has 7 million of the country's 46 million inhabitants. A poll published by *El País* in late January of that year found that nearly half of the Spaniards who responded felt that the proposal threatened to split Spain. Zapatero, despite having stated that he would accept a statute as approved by the Catalan parliament, then eliminated many of the more radical elements of the proposed Catalan statute, including terms such as 'sovereignty', 'independence' and 'self-determination of the people'. Six of the seventeen autonomous communities' statutes including those of Andalusia, Aragón, Balearic Islands, Castile-León, Catalonia and Valencia were also revised at the time, with the aim of enhancing coordination across these communities and between the autonomous communities and central government (Field 2011, 11). However, in some quarters fears were fuelled that the regions would seek more control of their own funds, undermining the authority of the central government and leaving it without adequate resources (Mclean 2006).

3. César Vidal, Historian, Historical Novelist and Extremist

The preceding section has outlined many of the political and social changes ushered in by the new Socialist government between 2004 and 2008. These changes were considered to be damaging to traditional Spanish society by many on the political right and the Catholic Church. César Vidal, was one of the most outspoken critics of Zapatero at the time and used his nightly slot on the Catholic, conservative *COPE* radio channel to launch attacks on the new Socialist government's policies on terrorism, immigration and welfare, policies which he believed were playing a part in the decline of moral and spiritual values amongst Spaniards. After 2009, when he left the *COPE* channel, he went on to work for *esRadio* and *Libertad Digital* TV from where he continued to spread his messianic message.

Vidal continues to maintain a high profile in the press, on radio and in digital media, which he has used to promote his right-wing extremist values and ideas to anyone who will listen. The importance of conservative media networks in the dissemination and promotion of right-wing key ideas and policies has been highlighted by Burack and Snyder-Hall (2010) and Meager (2012). Burack and Snyder-Hall, examined the popularity of the 1980s American call-in radio show hosted by Rush Limbaugh that

pioneered the development of 'hate radio'. This format provided listeners (mainly male, middle-aged, well-educated and conservative) with a platform to express extremist views, which the authors describe as 'right-wing propaganda, relentless attacks on liberalism, sexism bordering on misogyny, subtle racism and gay-bashing' (Burack, Snyder-Hall 2010, 448). Meager has also described how the mass media can play a huge part in promoting a radical conservative agenda. He argues that traditionally the conservatives are more coordinated and better at information sharing than the political left because of their direct and indirect contact with think tanks, interest groups and foundations that develop and promote the Right's key ideas and policies (Meager 2012, 470). For example, the Tea Party Movement, a network of influential small ultra-conservative groups formed in 2009 and known for their links to the Republican Party, generally manifests a distrust for politicians, government and the media and is often motivated by a hidden agenda of extreme views and issues that go beyond those upon which the movement was created: these may include nativism,²³⁹ anti-Islamic sentiment, religiously motivated forms of social conservatism in the area of reproductive rights and LGBT rights and scepticism about young Americans' values and commitments to hard work (Burack and Snyder-Hall 2012, 445). This list of preoccupations and issues bears an uncanny resemblance to the topics of concern that César Vidal speaks and writes about in the media today from his new base in Miami, USA.

Book publishing is another strategy used by political conservatives to promote their message and this is a channel that has been fully taken advantage of by César Vidal. As in *Artorius*, in many of his works he often chooses a medieval setting which is aligned with a medieval discourse that serves a very particular presentist political agenda. For example, in 2002 Vidal published the novel *Yo, Isabel la Católica*.²⁴⁰ Isabella I of Castile (b.1451-d.1504) was a queen of Spain and the wife of Ferdinand II of Aragon. The couple's marriage in 1469 led to the unification of Spain and they became known as the Catholic monarchs. Vidal's novel is set at the end of Isabella's life when Isabella is collating her deathbed memoirs in a diary later entrusted to her

²³⁹ Nativism is 'an ideology which holds that states should be inhabited exclusively by members of the native group (the nation) and that non-native elements (persons and ideas) are threatening to the homogenous nation state' (Mudde 2010, 1173).

²⁴⁰ I, Isabella the Catholic.

Jewish physician Haym ben Isaac. After her death, her husband Ferdinand requests the diary from the doctor, who then rereads it thus forming the base of the narrative of the novel. As Gilmour (2016, 7-8) points out, Vidal uses the narrative voice of ben Isaac to paint a very favourable view of Queen Isabella whilst ensuring that any positive references to King Ferdinand's contribution to the *Reconquista*²⁴¹ are edited out. Gilmour suggests that Vidal invites his reader to evaluate Isabella and her actions positively as she was Castilian and not Aragonese, thus reflecting Vidal's disdain of the troublesome autonomous regions of modern Spain and their demands on central government. Throughout the novel, Queen Isabella is portrayed in an exemplary light, as an intelligent woman devoted to God, her family, and her subjects. In this way, proposes Gilmour, the novel serves a double contemporary purpose. Firstly, it reads as a vindication of the actions of Spain's most famous Catholic Queen in expelling the Jews and the Muslims from the Peninsula that counters modern-day accusations against her of intolerance and racism and, secondly, Muslims are painted in a negative light as a people bent on destroying everything that Christians hold dear. At one point, the physician suggests that Spain should take control of the Straits of Gibraltar, because if not, then Muslims would arrive on Spanish shores and take everything, leading to another invasion. As Gilmour suggests, it is not difficult to see how this image might bring to mind the recent influx of undocumented immigrants arriving in Spain from North Africa in the 1990s and the early 21st century. The contemporary Spanish reader is implicitly invited by Vidal to make this connection, and see Muslims as much a threat to Spain then as now.

Two other novels written by Vidal about Maimonides, the Spanish and Jewish philosopher of the 12th century, may also be read as a commentary on modern-day society. In *El médico de Sefarad* (2004) Maimonides, the first-person narrator, tells the story of his life in Córdoba, his enforced conversion to Islam and subsequent exile to Muslim lands. In exile, he observes life under Islamic rule and describes the cruelty and barbarism that he witnesses. In the second novel, *El médico del sultán* (2005), Maimonides comes into contact with Saladin, the Muslim military leader and is forced to accompany him on a *jihad* to reclaim the Holy Land from the Christians.

241 The term *Reconquista* refers to the eight centuries during which the Christian kings of the Spanish kingdoms gradually reclaimed their country from the Moors who had invaded the Iberian Peninsula in 711.

Maimonides contrasts the brutality of the Muslim forces with the gallantry of the Christian knights pointing out that the Christians were too trustful of the treacherous Muslims living in their community, a factor that led to their defeat when tricked into an unwise attempt to rescue a Christian woman from the Muslim forces. This image invites modern-day comparisons to atrocities carried out in the name of Allah in early 21st century New York, Madrid and London and underlines the idea that Muslims are not to be trusted: they are the enemy within, undermining and betraying the Christian nation of Spain (Gilmour 2016, 9). In both these novels, Vidal places an author's note at the end of the fictional text. In *El médico de Sefarad* he attributes three fundamental values as being important to the intellectually respected and credible figure of Maimonides, which are 'God, family and knowledge'. According to Vidal, these are the values that are under attack in contemporary Western society and their loss could lead to the extinction of civilised society. Combined with Maimonides' constant portrayal of the negative interfaith relations within the novel, Vidal once again uses a parallel between the Middle Ages and modern times to serve as a warning: Muslims and Christians cannot coexist peacefully.

César Vidal's works have attracted little meritorious comment from other historians as they are considered to have minimal historiographical value. The following represents some of the allegations made against him regarding the authenticity of his historical investigations. In 1995, Miguel Á. Molinaro, an Egyptologist from the University of La Laguna in Tenerife, published a review of Vidal's 1993 book *Manetón. Historia de Egipto*.²⁴² Molinaro points out that Vidal's claim to have edited the work and personally translated it from Greek is highly suspicious, as there was ample evidence to show that his work relied heavily on an edition and translation by William G. Waddell for the Loeb Classical Library (Bravo López 2009). Tusell has labelled Vidal a 'revisionist historian' who does not embark on his research by dealing with primary sources but instead works with secondary sources which he then tries to fashion to give them authenticity, all the while giving importance to irrelevant data which he then manipulates in order to fit the data to his own agenda. Gonzalo Álvarez Chillida, a historian and professor at the *Universidad Complutense* in Madrid, also makes this point in his review of Vidal's 2004 book *España frente al Islam: de Mahoma*

242 *Manetho. A History of Egypt.*

a *Ben Laden*,²⁴³ where he claims that Vidal's account of the Rif War²⁴⁴ had been taken in its entirety from a single book published in 1971 entitled *Abd El-Krim y la guerra del Rif*²⁴⁵ by David Woolman. Chillida alleges that Vidal even copied Woolman's footnotes, while at the same time 'retouched' the parts of the narrative that he did not like, to make them correspond with the version of history that he wanted to transmit (Bravo López 2009). Historian Eduardo González Calleja, when giving his opinion on César Vidal's book *Checas de Madrid*²⁴⁶ (2003) similarly complained that: 'Estamos ante un ejemplo señero del "método" de confección de libros que ha dado notoriedad a este escritor'²⁴⁷ (Bravo López 2009). The comments of these eminent historians, therefore, add credence to the argument put forward in Chapter 6 'The Age of Arthur' that the rigour of César Vidal's historical research is highly questionable.

This said, César Vidal is a widely read and successful author. In the summer of 2005, three of his books were listed in the top ten best sellers list in Spain (Pita, 2005). In 2004, Vidal published the aforementioned work *España frente al Islam: de Mahoma a Ben Laden*. It was published around the time of the 11M attacks and promoted as a book that would allow the reader to inform himself about the essence of Islam without the straitjacket of political correctness. The work became a bestseller, exhausting four editions within six months (Gilmour, 2016). Between 2004 and 2009 it has appeared in nine hardback editions and twice in paperback (Bravo López, 2009).²⁴⁸ Gilmour (2016) points out that in the novel, Vidal uses every historical encounter between Christian Spain and Islamic *al-Andalus* as a way of justifying the 21st century political choices of the Aznar government (of which Vidal was a strong supporter) with respect to its decision to join the United States and the United Kingdom in the invasion of Iraq. However, this aside, *España frente al Islam* is a wholly islamophobic work (Bravo López, 2009). The text depicts Muslims as the historic invaders and archenemies of Spain who have always been a threat to its cultural survival (Gilmour 2016) and constructs the idea of Islam as an absolute evil,

243 *Spain against Islam: from Mohammed to Ben Laden*.

244 The Rif War was fought in the early 1920s between Spain and the Berbers of the Rif region in Morocco.

245 *Abd El-Krim and the Rif War*.

246 In the 1930s the *checas* were places in Madrid where opponents of the Spanish Republic were detained and tortured by Communist Party militia.

247 We have before us an unrivalled example of the literary confection 'method' which has given notoriety to this author.

248 A tenth hardback edition is now available on the Amazon website.

which must be resisted because the survival of western Christian culture depends on it (Bravo López 2009). In contemporary interviews, when questioned about the topic of immigration and discrimination against Muslims, Vidal has opined that the clash of values between the two cultures is not easily reconciled and that Islam is an entity incapable of changing over time. Responding to Elena Pita's question in a 2005 interview for *El Mundo* magazine as to whether Muslims make good neighbours Vidal replied: 'la vecindad musulmana es angustiosa, horrible, porque es una cultura que no quiere integrarse sino mantenerse aparte, y en un momento dado, imponerse'.²⁴⁹ Her further question as to whether he considered Islam to be a threat to the Western world elicited this xenophobic response: 'Históricamente lo ha sido, siempre; y ahora no es distinto: su escala de valores es incompatible con la democracia'.²⁵⁰ *España frente al Islam*, like *Artorius*, plays on fears and anxieties about the Islamic world since the 9/11 Twin Towers attacks in the United States. In both novels, Vidal's negative vision of interfaith relations is designed to serve as a warning to the present, creating a parallel between the events of the Middle Ages and those of modern times.

The distrustfulness and paranoia exhibited by César Vidal over the belief that the security and basic values of one group (Christians) are threatened by another (Muslims) manifest the underlying psychology described by Hofstadter relating to individuals who tend to look to conspiracy theories to make sense of troubling realities. Individuals who hold extreme political views, irrespective of whether these are left or right-wing views have been shown to have an increased susceptibility to conspiratorial ideas (Van Prooijen, Krouwel and Pollet, 2015, 576). It has also been demonstrated that both sets of political extremes believe, more strongly than politically moderate individuals, in simple solutions to societal problems and that 'political extremism is associated with black-and-white thinking in which social stimuli are classified as good or evil, positive or negative' (Van Prooijen, Krouwel and Pollet 2015, 570). Considering the answer to problems in terms of only one simple clear-cut solution is the extremist's way of coping with feelings of uncertainty and fear at times of threat by making the world more understandable and predictable.

249 (The idea of)... having a Muslim neighbour is worrying, horrible, because it is a culture that does not want to integrate but to keep itself apart, and then at some given moment, impose itself.

250 Historically, it always has been, and now is no different: its set of values is incompatible with democracy.

<http://www.elmundo.es/suplementos/magazine/2005/308/1124462484.html>

Conspiracy beliefs are therefore a coping mechanism that helps to provide causal explanations for complex and distressing events in which an individual may feel a lack of control. Hofstadter believes that the paranoid sees the conspiracy as:

directed against a nation, a culture, a way of life whose fate affects not himself alone but millions of others... His sense that his political passions are unselfish and patriotic, in fact, goes far to intensify his feeling of righteousness and his moral indignation. (Hofstadter 1966 cited in Moynihan 1985, 109)

These words resonate clearly with what has been demonstrated in the previous pages to be a similar messianic mission on the part of César Vidal to save the fate of modern Spanish civilisation from the imposition of any values, social, religious or political that are different from his own.

3. 1 César Vidal and His Campaign Against José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero

César Vidal has taken every opportunity over the years to express his loathing of Zapatero and the damage he considers he did to Spain. In 2008 he published a book of political cartoons entitled *La Ezpaña de ZP* lampooning the events and the politicians who played a part in Zapatero's first term. In the introduction to the book he clearly attributes personal blame to Zapatero for dismantling the foundations and beliefs he believes to be integral to Spanish society:

ZP ha logrado deteriorar la economía española en tres años más de lo que Felipe González pudo conseguirlo en dos legislaturas y ha erosionado nuestro sistema legal y constitucional mucho más de lo que hubiera podido pensar el más pesimista en 2004. Eso sin tener en cuenta sus medidas de ataque a las familias y a las creencias más entrañablemente queridas por millones de españoles; sus intentos de fracturar una sociedad reconciliada hace décadas; su empeño en

adoctrinar a las criaturas con ese engendro político denominado 'Educación para la ciudadanía'.²⁵¹ (Vidal 2008a, 2)

An excellent source of information for building up an idea of César Vidal's sense of values and religious and political beliefs and his opinion of Zapatero is the book *La libertad tiene un precio* (2012). In the spring of 2012 Vidal and his long term friend and media colleague Federico Jiménez Losantos, with whom he had worked on *COPE* and later on *esRadio*, met at a *parador*²⁵² in Segovia, Spain, for a series of informal conversations that were published in the above-named book. The conversations constitute a lament over what both see as the decline of the Spanish nation at the time their meeting took place. One of the important revelations that emerges, and vital to the argument of this chapter, is that they both feel that a large part of the blame for Spain's plight lies with José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero. This is reflected in the following statement made by César Vidal about Zapatero's political legacy: 'Es curioso que ya nadie se acuerde de Zapatero y de su responsabilidad en la situación que vivimos ahora'²⁵³ (Vidal, Jiménez Losantos 2012, Part 2, Loc 1837). Vidal has also gone on record elsewhere for saying that: 'Zapatero va a pasar a la Historia como el hombre que aniquiló al partido Socialista'²⁵⁴ (Olalquiaga, 2011).

Vidal saw Zapatero's efforts to modernize Spain as an attempt to dissolve family values, to negotiate with terrorists, to fracture Spain nationally, and to bring the economy to its knees through more corruption and lies. He felt that many of the new socialist measures went against the deep-rooted fundamental Christian values that he held dear. César Vidal's deep religiosity is expressed many times during the conversations in Segovia. In the following quote he speaks about his Christian values based on the teachings of the New Testament:

251 In three years ZP (Rodríguez Zapatero) has damaged the Spanish economy more than Felipe González was able to do in two terms. He has eroded our legal and constitutional system to a far greater extent than any pessimist in 2004 could have predicted. All that without taking into account the measures which attacked the family and the most dearly loved beliefs of millions of Spaniards; his attempts to fracture a society which had been reconciled decades ago; his determination to indoctrinate youngsters with this idiotic political-pedagogic scheme called 'Education for citizenship'. This is now a subject taught in Spanish secondary schools.

252 Paradors are government-run luxury hotels in Spain that are often located in historic buildings.

253 It is strange how nobody remembers Zapatero and his responsibility for the situation in which we now live.

254 Zapatero will go down in History as the man who destroyed the Socialist Party.

Todo eso que se puede encontrar en las páginas de la Biblia a mí personalmente, me proporciona luz, certeza, tranquilidad, sosiego y paz, porque además, por añadidura, la práctica de una conducta muy concreta de seguimiento de Jesús no es el pago del billete al cielo sino la respuesta al regalo del billete al cielo que Cristo me hizo al morir por mí en la cruz.²⁵⁵ (Vidal, Jiménez Losantos 2012, Part 4, Loc. 2938)

César Vidal's strong religious beliefs permeate his discourse as a writer and historian and provide the shape and meaning to his political beliefs and orientations. It is possible that his ultra-religious beliefs lie behind the difficulties he has encountered in responding to rapid and unpopular socio-economic change. People with such fundamental Christian beliefs often react by blaming these 'unwelcome' changes on the presiding government and view the alteration in the *status quo* as a crisis or problem that is moral in nature and thus requiring a religious solution. Fundamentalist Christians will, therefore, call for a return to an idealised past with patriarchal family structures and strong family values as an answer to the perceived problems with society (Keddie 1998, 717).

Vidal and Jiménez Losantos reminisce that when growing up in Spain in the 1950s and 60s values were based on a sense of family, personal responsibility, religion and the Ten Commandments which gave people structure in their lives but this, they feel, has now disappeared. The family as a social unit was integral to a well-functioning society. Parents pushed their children to study, work hard and take advantage of all the opportunities that had not been available to them as children because of the legacy of deprivation bequeathed by the Spanish Civil War. Vidal believes strongly that in 21st century Spain this ethic no longer exists and offers an historical explanation for the lack of a *cultura de esfuerzo*²⁵⁶ amongst Spaniards, other southern Mediterranean peoples and Hispanics. He suggests that the Catholic Counter-Reformation movement, which emerged in southern Europe in the 16th century in

²⁵⁵ Everything that can be found in the pages of the Bible personally brings me light, certainty, tranquility, calm and peace because, besides and in addition, to follow Jesus in a very precise way is not to purchase a ticket to heaven but the response to the gift of the ticket to heaven which Christ gave when he died for me on the cross.

²⁵⁶ Work ethic.

response to the Protestant Reformation, played a large part in the loss of the work ethic in Catholic countries (Vidal, Jiménez Losantos 2012, Part 4, Loc, 3012). In contrast, the Protestant Reformation that took hold in northern Europe under the leadership of Martin Luther and John Calvin heralded a new perspective on the value of work as something valuable and honourable in the eyes of God that should be carried out with an attitude of service to the Almighty. In Vidal's opinion, this spirit of reform encapsulated the true concept and vision of work that was portrayed in the Bible.

4. Textual Analysis of *Artorius*

In *Artorius*, Vidal retells the story of the eponymous hero through the eyes and words of the homodiegetic narrator Merlin, who is a physician, good friend and advisor of Artorius. Vidal portrays Merlin with the most human of qualities, the ability to feel love and temptation, pain and sadness, possibly in an attempt to muster the sympathy of his readers and make them more receptive to his literary narrator who acts as a mouthpiece for his own political and religious views. Each chapter of *Artorius*, except for the first, is accompanied by a prologue in the form of an *exemplum*. This opens with a Latin quote taken either from the Roman poet Virgil's group of pastoral poems known as the *Eclogues*, or from his epic poem the *Aeneid*, or, in a few instances, from the Bible. The *exemplum* is a classical rhetorical device that is used in literature that seeks to explain a doctrine or emphasize a moral point. The Romans modelled the *exemplum* on the Greek *paradeigma*, a term that refers to a pattern, example or sample. Greek orators used the model of the *paradeigma* to compare the situation of their audience to a similar past event, in much the same way as the parable is used in the New Testament in the Bible (Suleiman 1983, 27). The exercise aimed to facilitate an interpretation of the 'example' with the hope that the comparisons made with a contemporary problem or issue might guide or influence their listeners to take a particular course of action. In the Middle Ages, *exempla* of all kinds were collected in volumes and used to inculcate Christian moral values and principles in their audience.

The *exemplum* that accompanies each chapter of *Artorius* is an almost wholly didactic part of the paratext that aims to demonstrate to the reader the validity and correctness of a particular set of values that Vidal wishes to inculcate, and then to persuade them to modify their actions accordingly and to act in a certain way for their spiritual good. This is a characteristic that the *exemplum* shares with the *roman à thèse*. Within the few succinct Latin words that begin each chapter is encapsulated the crux of the clear moral or political message that Vidal wishes to impart in the chapter: the remainder of the prologue is then used to expand these ideas and make comments on human nature and society which may be interpreted not only as a critique of Britain at the time of *Artorius* but also as a critique of 21st century Spain. The language used in these paratextual spaces is often persuasive, conforming to the type of performative utterance that was described in the introduction to this chapter. For example, in Chapter VI of the first section of the novel Merlin describes his meeting with Vortegirn, the *Regissimus*, painting a picture of the High King and his aides Maximus and Roderick as apostates who have renounced the Christian faith and smoothed the way for pagan customs to enter *Britannia*. The prologue to Chapter VI begins with a Latin quote taken from Virgil's *Aeneid* (Book V1, line 563): *Nulli fas casto scleratum insistere limen*²⁵⁷ (Vidal 2008, 61). This is the locution. The next step in the pattern is the illocutionary utterance where Vidal, via his mouthpiece Merlin, explains the meaning of the locution for the reader in Spanish. In this particular case he does so by providing a general explanation to make the point: 'la cercanía de los malvados es siempre peligrosa',²⁵⁸ and then, a more literal translation of the Latin into Spanish, 'a ningún inocente le está permitido pisar el umbral de los criminales'.²⁵⁹ In order to further emphasise the moral message, Vidal informs his reader that the same sentiment is to be found in the first psalm of the Book of Psalms which he then paraphrases in Spanish as, 'una de las características del hombre justo es que no se sienta a la misma mesa que aquellos que no tienen en cuenta a Dios en sus acciones'.²⁶⁰ The perlocutionary effect of Merlin's/Vidal's words is then further

257 It is wrong for any pure soul to set foot on the impious threshold. See <https://www.uq.edu.au/hprcflex/lt2250/vergil4.htm> for translation.

258 Being close to wicked people is always dangerous.

259 No pure person is allowed to cross the criminal threshold.

260 One of the characteristics of the just man is that he does not sit at the same table as those who do not pay heed to God in their actions.

enhanced by his choice of exhortative vocabulary, for instance 'hay que',²⁶¹ 'debemos'²⁶² which is designed to urge the reader to a particular course of action resulting from the utterance, namely that good people must set themselves apart from the 'wicked'. This is the pattern to be found in the majority of the novel's prologues and is an effective technique by which Vidal imposes his Christian and social values on the reader.

In using this intertextual technique Vidal emulates the methods of the great Classical authors. Virgil himself used the pastoral genre (the *Eclogues*) to manifest his concerns over the rapid changes that were happening in Rome and Italy after the civil war between Julius Caesar and Pompey. The themes of economic depression, social and political instability, and a collapsing confidence in traditional faiths and institutions that are found in the *Eclogues*, are similarly used by Vidal in the prologues to *Artorius* to manifest his opinions on what was happening to Spanish society under Zapatero's government. For example, Chapter II of *Artorius* begins with the quote, *Tu maior; tibi me est aequum parere*²⁶³ taken from Virgil's eclogue V. In this eclogue the two herdsmen Menalcas and Mopsus take turns to sing about the death of another shepherd, Daphnis. Throughout the *Eclogues*, the use of memory in the recall, performance and transmission of the herdsmen's songs is important as it unites and binds the community of singing herdsmen and helps them to define the past and consider its lessons for the future. In the same way that Virgil (speaking in the present via the herdsmen) laments the passing of an idyllic pastoral existence in Rome and Italy and the transition into civil war, so too does Merlin, the narrator of *Artorius*, lament the passing of the great Roman Empire, its culture and language and the protection that it offered Britain in the 5th century, until the coming of the Barbarian invasions. Merlin explains the secret of the Roman Empire's longevity and success in the following way:

Una sociedad se sustenta sobre la base de apoyarse en la
experiencia y el saber de los que vivieron antes. Fue esa

²⁶¹ One must.

²⁶² We must, we have to.

²⁶³ You are greater and that is why it is right I should obey you. Translation from
<http://www.sacredtexts.com/cla/virgil/ecl/ecll05htm>

conducta la que permitió sobrevivir a Roma durante siglos porque creían en la necesidad de respetar las *mores maiorum*...²⁶⁴ (Vidal 2008, 15)

The unwritten code of the *mores maiorum* contained lessons for life and social norms that were passed down by the elders to the younger generation and these were respected and acted upon. Indeed, at Rome, '[m]emory was the principal vehicle for the transmission and perpetuation of past culture. Success in the present stemmed from remembering the past, and a well-functioning and stable republic in the present, was intricately connected to a firm control of memory' (Meban 2009, 102).

Through the opinions of his narrator Merlin, Vidal manipulates a three-way intertextual recognition linking the crisis that faced Rome during the Roman civil war in Virgil's time, the crisis that arose in Britain, brought about by the invasion of the Barbarians in the 5th century, and the cultural and social crisis facing contemporary Spain, brought on by the policies of the Socialist government and which threatened to rock the pillars upon which modern Spanish society had been founded. The use of this intertextual comparative technique that forms the basis of the *exemplum* fits well with the model of the *roman à thèse* described by Suleiman. Indeed, the *exemplum* could be thought of as the distant ancestor of the *roman à thèse*, albeit in a simpler form (Suleiman 1983, 28). Using the paradigm of the New Testament parables as her explanatory template, Suleiman hypothesises that 'every story of an "exemplary" nature [...] is sooner or later designated, by the parabolic text itself, as needing interpretation, that is, as containing a meaning *other* (or *more*) than the immediate meaning of the events it recounts' (Suleiman 1983, 30). Thus, in the textual example from *Artorius* under discussion, we can observe the three hierarchically related levels that Suleiman believes define the *roman à thèse* (Suleiman 1983, 35). The first level is the Virgilian narrative discourse that is used to make a moral point. The second level is that of the interpretative discourse that comments on that point to expose its meaning: this takes the form of a generalization. The third level is what Suleiman

²⁶⁴ A society is kept alive by relying upon the experience and knowledge of those who have lived before. It was this way of living that allowed Rome to survive for centuries because people believed in the need to respect the *mores maiorum*. (The *mores maiorum* is a Latin term that means "The way of the elders").

refers to as the pragmatic discourse, which derives a rule of action from the meaning of the interpretative discourse that takes the form of an imperative or injunction addressed to the receiver or reader. In hierarchical terms, the interpretation of the story then becomes more important than the story itself as it is the element that contains the real message and the indirect means by which the call for action is communicated.

Vidal then proceeds to insist on and strengthen his message, in the style of the *roman à thèse*, that a great society has to build on its solid foundations laid down through years of tradition and experience. Merlin laments the fact that the *barbari* were trying to bring their new customs and way of life to Britain:

*y si existe algo especialmente dañino en el compartamiento de los barbari es su ansiosa lucha por erradicar todo lo que nos enseñaron y por edificar un nuevo mundo sobre las ruinas del antiguo... Esfuerzo perdido, soberbia supina, estupidez profunda, porque escuchar a los mayores, aburrido o sugestivo, es una de las condiciones para evitar que nuestro mundo se hunda. Sólo un barbari se negaría, por necedad o egoísmo, a verlo.*²⁶⁵ (Vidal 2008, 15)

This passage demonstrates César Vidal's deep-rooted belief in the value of tradition, something he also alludes to in *La libertad tiene un precio* when he speaks of the changes in the Spanish family: 'La idea del abuelo o la abuela como personaje presente ha desaparecido'²⁶⁶ (Vidal 2012 Part 1, Loc 351), and the decline of the importance of the observance of religion in giving structure to people's lives. This thesis suggests that the foolish and egotistic *barbari* to whom Vidal refers in the text, alludes to Zapatero and his political colleagues, who Vidal sees as acting like barbarians in dismantling the foundations of Spanish society and tampering with the

265 if there is something especially noxious about a barbarian's behaviour it is the eagerness of his struggle to wipe out everything we have been taught and build a new world on the ruins of the old one... It's a waste of energy, spineless arrogance, profound stupidity, for listening to one's elders, be it boring or thought-provoking, is one of the ways that we stop our world from crumbling. Only a foolish and egotistic barbarian would refuse to see that.

266 The idea of the grandmother or grandfather as being present has disappeared.

social norms that have provided a structure to people's lives by enabling such social changes as contained in the Abortion Act, the Same-sex Marriage Act and the Divorce Act.

As Sanz Mingo (2012) has also pointed out, there may also be allegorical references in the text to the immigration problem that faced Zapatero in his first term. In Vidal's text, we read:

Creo que el error fue dejar que los *barbari* pasaran al interior del imperio... Al principio, venían sólo a trabajar la tierra, o, al menos, eso era lo que decían.²⁶⁷ (Vidal 2008, 114)

This is a comment made by the legionary Betavir, when speaking to Blastus, the teacher of Merlin, and it is not difficult to arrive at the conclusion that when talking about the *barbari* Vidal is referring allegorically to the huge numbers of immigrants, illegal, legal or asylum seekers, who have poured into Spain, bringing with them their alien languages and unfamiliar cultures. The metaphor of the Barbarian as a created enemy is an interesting historical phenomenon. The term Barbarian was used by the ancient Greeks to describe anyone who did not speak the dominant culture's language, but centuries later, in the Roman period, it came to define all those considered to be wild and uneducated, and who threatened the destabilization of imperial power (Sánchez-Medina 2010). In *The Fear of Barbarians* (2010) Tzvetan Todorov defines barbarians as 'those who do not acknowledge that others are human beings like themselves' (Todorov 2010, 16). This lack of empathy is most likely to occur with others who do not speak the same language or share the same customs: 'Linguistic impotence becomes a sign of inhumanity' (Todorov 2010, 18) as it means that the foreigner is prevented from perceiving the native as completely human; thus he is a barbarian (Todorov, 2010, 18). As the West's base of political and economic power has begun to diminish it has become more suspicious and fearful in its dealings with outsiders who are now perceived as a threat in the competition for power and resources (Todorov 2010, 5). The psychological creation of the threat of

²⁶⁷ The mistake was to let the *barbari* into the Empire . . . At first they only came to work the land, or, at least, that is what they said.

the Barbarian ‘other’ as a risk to stability within a society has therefore been developed as a propagandistic and manipulative technique to instigate fear within a native population and it is to this end that César Vidal employs the metaphor of the Barbarian in his novel *Artorius*. The statistics provided by Checa Olmos and Arjona Garrido in their 2012 paper, referred to earlier in this chapter, indicate the presence of such fears in Spanish society during Zapatero’s first term of office.

In Chapter III of *Artorius* Vidal describes how Vortegirn, the *Regissimus Britanniae*,²⁶⁸ allowed the barbarian tribes to settle in Britannia after the two pagan warlord brothers Horsa and Hengist helped him to stop the attacks on his kingdom from the Picts in the north (Vidal 2008, 35). After marrying Ronwen, daughter of Hengist, Vortegirn adopts the pagan practices of his wife and within weeks pagan artefacts spring up in Britannia and soothsayers appear at court (Vidal 2008, 36). The *barbari* are allowed to plunder the land, the Christian *britanni* are forced underground to practise their religion and many of them begin to mix with the pagans (Vidal 2008, 76). In the following passage, Merlin asks himself what the *britanni* must have thought of their oppressed situation. He believes that the majority of them must have objected to it, but rather than make a stand, a culture of silence was adopted:

Por supuesto, los *britanni* debían haber protestado ante aquellos abusos y defendido su fe cristiana. No lo hicieron. Tenían temor de que se les acusara de fanáticos, de carentes de comprensión, de falta de hospitalidad, y en apenas unos años-muy pocos-vieron cómo aquellos recién llegados se apoderaban, poco a poco, de sus calles y de sus campos.²⁶⁹
(Vidal 2008, 37)

Once again, within these words, a veiled allegorical criticism of Zapatero’s handling of the immigration crisis may be detected. Vidal saw Zapatero’s failure to set a limit on immigrant numbers and his soft policy towards illegal immigrants already in the

²⁶⁸ High King of the Britains.

²⁶⁹ Of course, the *britanni* ought to have protested against those abuses and defended their Christian faith. They did not do so. They were afraid that they would be accused of being fanatical, of lacking understanding, of lacking hospitality, and in hardly any time – very little time – they saw how the new arrivals began, little by little, to take over their towns and countryside.

country as a threat to the stability of Spanish society. However, his criticism is aimed not so much against Latin American illegal immigrants but against Muslims who, in his opinion, pose a serious threat to the Christian faith. Vidal insists via his narrator and mouthpiece, Merlin, that nobody in power spoke out about these supposed injustices. The need for people to speak out in support of their beliefs is a theme often mentioned by Vidal. For example, when Vortegirn returns with Constanze and proclaims himself the new *Regissimus* in spite of his unsuitability for the role, not one of the powerful bishops opposes him. The parallel is drawn with the downfall of Rome which Merlin attributes to those in power turning a blind eye to disorder: ‘cuando los ladrones y los asesinos merodean por los caminos, en lugar de castigarlos, ah no, lejos de eso, que satisfagan su hambre’²⁷⁰ (Vidal 2008, 113). For the reader, who can appreciate the contextual link, this idea also expresses Vidal’s opinion that the Spanish public needed to speak out about Zapatero because of the supposed danger that he posed (according to Vidal’s values) to the ‘decline’ of morals and spirituality in Spain.

According to Vidal, Zapatero showed his willingness to take bold action on major issues from the very outset, acting in a God-like manner, as the following passage, which appears in the prologue to Chapter III of the fifth section of the novel, suggests:

*Ocasionalmente Dios permite que algunos seres perversos se encaramen hasta la cima del gobierno. Generalmente, tan inicuos individuos creen que tienen el poder o, por lo menos, la legitimidad del mismo Dios. Entonces actúan como si las estructuras de la creación pudieran modificarse a su antojo.*²⁷¹
(Vidal 2008, 307)

The above passage illustrates clearly César Vidal’s outrage at Zapatero’s belief that he had the right to amend and change fundamental tenets of Spanish society. Vidal seems to suggest that many of these changes contravened the ‘laws of Nature’ as is

270 When thieves and robbers prowl the streets, instead of being punished, oh no, far from that, let them satisfy their hunger.

271 Occasionally God allows wicked people to climb to the heights of government. Generally such evil individuals believe that they have the power, or at least, the legitimacy of God himself. Then they act as if they can change what God has created as they please.

hinted in the continuation of the prologue to chapter three that speaks about evil men at the head of government:

*En todos y cada uno de los casos, estos gobernantes indignos olvidan algo tan elemental como lo que dejó escrito el admirable Virgilio al referirse a unas normas eternas de la Naturaleza que son anteriores a cualquier ley humana... Estoy convencido de que si estuviera en sus manos obligarían a los ríos a discurrir en dirección opuesta al mar, cambiarían de sexo a los seres humanos, convertirían a los simios en hermanos de los hombres e incluso aniquilarían la familia.*²⁷² (Vidal 2008, 307)

It is possible that here Vidal may have in mind three of Zapatero's major social reforms that had a huge impact on Spaniards' lives, namely the Abortion Act (2004), the Divorce Act (2005) and the Same-sex Marriage Act (2005) as examples of the contravention of Nature. Sanz Mingo has suggested that in the scene where Merlin's mentor, Blastus, welcomes the soldiers Caius and Betavir back from their visit to Rome after their mission to recruit military reinforcements for the defence of Britannia against the invading barbarians, this could be a criticism by Vidal of the ideas of modern-day women and an allusion to the impact of the changes brought about by the *Ley del Aborto* of 2004. Betavir explains that values in Roman society were beginning to change, including family values, as exemplified in the fact that Roman women no longer desired to have children, as they considered them to be a burden: 'los niños lloran, los niños estropean la figura, los niños son una molestia para acudir a las diversiones, los niños... cuestan dinero'²⁷³ (Vidal 2008, 114).

The topic of divorce arises several times in the passages of text that mention Artorius's relationship with his first wife Leonor of Gwent. A merchant from London, who visits Merlin at his *studium*, informs Merlin of the rumour that Artorius was

²⁷² In each and every case, as was written by the admirable poet Virgil, these despicable rulers forget something as fundamental as referring to the eternal laws of Nature which predate any human law... I am convinced that if they had their way they would make the rivers flow away from the sea, they would change the sex of humans, they would turn monkeys into men's brothers and even destroy the family unit.

²⁷³ Children cry, children ruin the figure, they are a pain when you take them to the games...they cost money.

seeking a divorce from Leonor on the grounds of adultery and her refusal to bear him any children (Vidal 2008, 304). Later Artorius comes to seek Merlin's advice on the matter and it is here, in Merlin's handling of the situation, that we may detect something of Vidal's conservative attitude towards the institution of marriage and divorce. A little later in the text, in another reference to the divorce, the reader can detect a sense of disparagement in Merlin's opinion of Artorius's actions:

Hubiera deseado equivocarme en todo lo que le había advertido a Artorius... El hombre que ahora se hacía llamar *imperator britanniae* [sic] no tardó en repudiar a Leonor de Gwent y en hallar a una nueva esposa.²⁷⁴ (Vidal 2008, 329)

The narrator Merlin (hence Vidal) unfailingly exhibits a Manichean philosophy towards life: in other words, there is always a clear-cut frontier between good and evil, which helps guide him, the good Christian, along the path of righteousness and shows him the correct way to live here on earth. This is illustrated in Chapter V of the third part of the novel, entitled *Lacus Domina*,²⁷⁵ where Merlin decides to leave the island of Avalon and his pagan lover Vivian. Merlin speaks of the torment he feels that his union with Vivian can never be complete in the Christian sense as her values and beliefs, which do not conform to his Christian ideals, prevent him from loving her with the whole of his being. True Christian love is not simply carnal knowledge of another but a union of soul and spirit, which are the combination of elements that according to Saint Paul make up the complete human being. The concept of sin and repentance upon which the Christian religion is based is anathema to Vivian. Whilst reading from Merlin's Book of Gospels she makes these feelings known in her outburst against the injustice she feels has been meted out to the presumed adulteress Mary Magdalene, as related in the gospel story. Vivian's objections and well-constructed argument that Mary Magdalene had done nothing wrong, and had neither deserved to be stoned nor to require Jesus's pardon, could equally have been made by a 21st century feminist. However, Merlin's response to Vivian's 'progressive'

²⁷⁴ I would like to have been wrong about the advice I had given to Artorius... The man who had now proclaimed himself *imperator britanniae* lost no time in discarding Leonor of Gwent and in finding a new wife.

²⁷⁵ The Lady of the Lake.

ideas conforms rigidly to the Christian misogynistic view that always associated women with the dangers and degradation of the flesh. Asked by Vivian whether he thought adultery was a sin: '¿Lo es también que un hombre y una mujer yazcan sin estar casados?'²⁷⁶ (Vidal 2008, 195), Merlin replies in the affirmative, and in so doing aligns himself and consequently César Vidal to a story that has been used for centuries by believers in the Bible to discredit female sexuality and disempower women.

Throughout *Artorius*, César Vidal emphasises, through Merlin, the requirements needed to live a good Christian life in preparation for God's kingdom. For Vidal it is the family that should provide the educative and social framework for becoming a good citizen, not the Welfare State which removes the necessity of working hard in order to achieve success or financial reward: 'Pero ¡ay de aquellos jóvenes a los que se dio todo y se libró de todo tipo de contratiempos!'²⁷⁷ (Vidal 2008, 73). This sentiment was also strongly expressed by Vidal and Jiménez Losantos in their conversations recorded in their book *La libertad tiene un precio*. Another example of Vidal's firm opinion that instruction of the young in the work ethic is a vital part of good upbringing is evident in the first line of the prologue to Chapter IV (Part II) that begins: '*Dum faciles animi iuvenum, dum mobilis aetas*'.²⁷⁸ The idea behind this Virgilian quote is that a sense of good values and education must be instilled in a person from a very young age whilst the spirit is malleable and receptive or the opportunity to achieve great things is lost. Vidal proceeds to develop the message in the prologue by explaining that if this is not done then this will produce a person who lacks wisdom and integrity and is unable to enjoy a fruitful adult life: 'En sus primeros años, cuando su corazón era tierno y su espíritu moldeable, hubieran podido ser orientados hacia una vida sabia y fecunda, pero en lugar de educarles para el esfuerzo, se les alentó hacia el parasitismo'²⁷⁹ (Vidal 2008, 109). Vidal's attitude towards the importance of instilling independence of spirit into the young is evident

276 Is it also (a sin) that a man and a woman should lie down together without being married?

277 Alas! What will become of those youngsters who are given everything and are protected from all setbacks?

278 Enter on the path of training while their youthful spirits are docile, while their age is still pliant. Translation from <https://www.loebclassics.com/view/virgil-georgics/1916/pb>

279 In the early years, when the heart is tender and the spirit pliant, they could have been guided towards a wise and fruitful life, but instead of educating them for life's struggles, they raised them to become parasites.

in the part of the text where Merlin is asked to tend to a sick young boy. The boy is unable to tolerate his food and his doting parents are afraid that he will die. However, Merlin is convinced that the lad's problem is psychological rather than physical and stems from the overprotection of his parents:

Lo protegían, lo mimaban, lo cubrían en exceso. Tanto que su propia naturaleza se estaba rebelando y había decidido protestar arrojando todo alimento que le pasaba por la garganta.²⁸⁰ (Vidal 2008, 103)

The final battle scene in the novel highlights the treacherous deeds of Medrautus, who, by making a pact with the *barbari*, has not only betrayed Artorius but also his country and culture. Vidal describes him in the following way:

Sin duda, sus facciones eran blandas como las de un *puer*, pero, a la vez, carecía del candor y de la inocencia que son propios de los primeros años de existencia. Unas cejas extrañas, altivas, puntiagudas parecían separar los ojos de la frente, a la vez que descansaban sobre unas pupilas tan claras que casi parecían acuosas.²⁸¹ (Vidal 2008, 350)

Sanz Mingo has suggested that this vivid description of Artorius's nephew Medrautus as the lad with the pointed, bushy, eyebrows framing clear watery eyes bears a striking physical resemblance to José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero. Indeed, during his terms in office, Zapatero's thick eyebrows became something of a trademark for the man. It even became popular to refer to him with a gesture, derived from sign language, which involved the placing of the index finger of the right hand above the

280 They protected him, they spoiled him, and overindulged him. So much so that his very being was rebelling and had decided to protest by throwing up any foodstuff that went down his throat.

281 His features were unquestionably smooth like those of a *puer*, but at the same time they lacked the candour and innocence usually associated with those of a young age. His eyebrows, which seemed to separate his eyes from his forehead, were strange, arched and haughty looking and rested on eyes, so clear that they almost had a watery appearance. *Puer* is the Latin term for a boy.

eye in the form of a triangle, thus imitating the shape of his eyebrows.²⁸² A physical description of the Prime Minister in conversation at a meeting, written by Javier Valenzuela, a Spanish journalist and author who worked and travelled with Zapatero in the first two years of his first term, also strengthens the hypothesis of the similarity between the two. His following depiction of Zapatero also bears a striking resemblance to the description of Medrautus from the novel:

En los momentos en que esos ojos azules, intensos y húmedos te escrutan tan de cerca y sin pestañear, ZP suele soltar en voz baja, reforzando así el despliegue de confidencialidad, alguna de sus sentencias lapidarias.²⁸³ (Valenzuela 2007,47)

Other journalists who have written about Zapatero have spoken of him as an austere man, methodical and patient and always in the right place at the right time (Campillo 2004, 19), presumably a reference by his critics that he had only made it into government because of the circumstances of the Madrid bomb attack. The notion of fate and luck is also pertinent to the trajectory of the character Medrautus in the novel. Through fate, rather than any personal qualities of leadership of his own, Medrautus is propelled into the limelight in a final struggle with Artorius to claim what he, Medrautus, believed was his right as a direct descendant of the old *Regissimus* Aurelius Ambrosius. This is the reference that Vidal makes in the following lines taken from the prologue to the battle scene at Camlann: '*Cierto es que en ocasiones la suerte cae sobre aquellos que nunca hubiéramos pensado que serían objeto de sus atenciones*'²⁸⁴ (Vidal 2008, 345). Zapatero was also known to those close to him to show great resilience in overcoming internal resistance in government. As Campillo points out, he could: '*recuperarse con extraordinaria rapidez de cada caída, aprender de los errores*'²⁸⁵ (Campillo 2004, 25). This description connects strongly with the tenacity that is displayed by Medrautus during the fight between him and

282 Libertad Digital S.A [ES] 8/02/2008. <http://www.libertaddigital.com/sociedad/los-artistas-agradecen-a-zapatero-el-canon-con-un-video-ensalzando-sus-cejas-1276323143/>

283 At those times when those intense, watery blue eyes scrutinised you so closely, without blinking Zapatero would quietly, in a show of confidentiality, throw in one of his immortal phrases.

284 It is certain that occasionally luck falls upon those whom we would never have thought would have been the object of its attention.

285 to recover with extraordinary speed from every fall, to learn from mistakes.

Artorius: 'Medrautus torció el gesto, pero desde luego, no se dio por vencido'²⁸⁶ (Vidal 2008, 353). The evident disdain in which Vidal holds Prime Minister Zapatero is further expressed in the choice of derogatory vocabulary used to describe Medrautus in the dramatic duel scene. For example, the following terms and adjectives are to be found in the final battle scene: swine, disgusting traitor, rotten scum, repulsive being, Judas, and so on (Vidal 2008, 351-6).

Conclusion

This chapter has proposed that the novel *Artorius* is an allegory of the social and political situation in Spain at the time of José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero's first term in government. The discussion of the text has highlighted many areas in which the novel bears similarities to the genre of the *roman à thèse*, which is defined by Susan Suleiman as the type of novel that explicitly presents 'a recognized body of doctrine or system of ideas' (Suleiman 1983, 1). The *roman à thèse* must be recognised as an authoritarian genre and this chapter has emphasised the intensity of the engagement of the author, César Vidal, with his text, as he consistently imposes his authoritarian presence within the narrative via his narrator, Merlin. Vidal achieves this by utilising a number of rhetorical techniques to convey his sense of values and his political and religious convictions, namely, the *exemplum* or prologue, redundancy and intertextuality.

The use of the *exemplum* or prologue has been shown to be an important part of César Vidal's rhetorical technique as it always contains a powerful moral or political message. It is always designed to lead to a '*prise de conscience*'²⁸⁷ (Suleiman 1983, 146) and eventually to an action on the part of the reader. In the case of *Artorius*, it is suggested that Vidal hopes that his readers will be persuaded by his fundamental Christian worldview and thus accept the validity of his philosophical, religious and political beliefs. Therefore, it is important for him as an author to consistently convey his message so that readers may interpret it correctly and act in accordance with the 'truth' they have learned. The interpretation of the *exemplum* can only be successful if

²⁸⁶ Medrautus grimaced but of course did not give up.

²⁸⁷ An awareness or wake-up call.

there is the presence of an unambiguous dualistic system of values, some sort of comparison or parable which will reveal a true meaning: in the case of *Artorius* the Virgilian and Bible intertexts are used to help with interpretation. However, this type of indirect communication through intertextuality does run the risk of not being understood, as was discussed in relation to the use of parody and irony in Chapter 4 of this thesis. Here it was emphasized that there has to be a relationship between the author and the reader of the text if the 'said' and 'unsaid' meanings of the text are to be conveyed and understood. If the reader of the *roman à thèse* does not have a broad textual encyclopedia and is unable to make the intertextual link to Virgil or the Bible, then it is possible that he or she will miss the point that the author wishes to make. This is why in a didactic novel such as *Artorius* there is a constant repetition of the author's message in many forms, as this gives Vidal the best chance to impart his values to his readership. The chapter has demonstrated clearly that *Artorius* shares many traits with the literary genre of the *roman à thèse*, the most important one being that it aims to impose a single value-laden meaning on the text.

Importantly, it has also been noted that certain periods or historical moments are more apt to encourage the development of the *roman à thèse* than others. Such periods are often those that produce sharp social and ideological conflicts that may constitute a perceived climate of crisis in society (Suleiman 1983, 16). The chapter has revealed that at the time César Vidal wrote *Artorius* Spain was experiencing a great number of cultural changes evidenced in the array of wide-ranging social reforms that were brought in and passed as law by the Socialist government. Many examples taken from articles and literature beyond the text have indicated that, for Vidal and others with right-wing political and strong Christian values, such changes did indeed create a crisis of values. Often at these times of crisis, when there is a collapse of confidence in traditional faiths and institutions and economic depression, people tend to look nostalgically to the past, to the better days, for a sense of stability and cohesion. In *Artorius* Vidal attempts, through the evocation of memory, to get his reader to think back nostalgically to medieval times and beyond, and to the traditional Christian values of family, hard work, facing up to responsibilities, caring for those less fortunate and the importance of transmitting these values to the next generations. In this chapter, the introduction of Gilmour's work on what she terms as

'César Vidal's medievalizing novels' has helped to support the hypothesis that Vidal often writes to make parallels between contemporary Spain and an idealised medieval past.

Following Sanz Mingo's hypothesis, a strong case has also been made that within the text itself, Vidal is also able to allude to and criticize the many social changes, which he felt were detrimental to Spanish society and contravened his fundamental Christian beliefs: this is achieved, as has been mentioned, through Merlin's commentary and actions. In the next chapter of this thesis, which studies the representation of the 'body' in *Artorius*, it will be seen that the Christian Church in the Middle Ages enforced wide-ranging disciplines on the bodies of the members which made up its community and this too is mirrored in the behaviour and beliefs of Merlin. Merlin's principles and high moral values, in turn, serve to mirror César Vidal's deep Christian beliefs that originate from his interpretation of the teaching of St Paul in the New Testament. On whatever intertextual level the story of *Artorius* is read, it can be interpreted as a struggle between good and evil, linking it once more to the traits of the thesis novel. As Suleiman says '[t]he *roman à thèse* assumes this Manichean view and prides itself on it' (Suleiman, 1983, 101).

In the findings of this chapter, the conclusions from a number of theoretical studies on the nature of right-wing activism, Christian fundamentalism and Conspiracy Theory have aided the understanding of the factors that encourage the emergence of extremist reactions to changes in society and have helped to comprehend the psychology that lies behind César Vidal's media persona. The chapter has demonstrated that César Vidal's response in speaking out and expressing his opinions via his radio show, his many interviews and articles and the act of penning *Artorius* are all examples of his reaction to contemporary anxieties which indeed borders on the paranoid and conspiratorial.

It has also been suggested in the chapter that *Artorius* may be read as a work of religious and political propaganda, which has the goal of switching readers' value systems so that they identify more closely with Vidal's own. Authoritarian propagandists attempt to convey power and exert influence by defining a simple

reality that legitimates their value system, but this reality is often based on a distorted view of the world. This is a definition of the way propagandists function as outlined by Professor Jason Stanley in an article on the authoritarianism of the current President of the United States, Donald Trump (Stanley 2016, 1-19). The goal of such propaganda, Stanley says,

is to sketch out a consistent system that is simple to grasp, one that both constructs and simultaneously provides an explanation for grievances against various out groups. It is openly intended to distort reality, partly as an expression of the leader's power. (Stanley 2016, 9)

Once these 'out groups', namely people who feel neglected by the system, have come to believe that their economic and social woes are the result of corrupt elites in conspiracy with 'others', Stanley suggests that they become incapable of rational evaluation of facts. Once the fiction or distorted reality is accepted then the only thing that will be listened to is whatever is consistent with it. For the propagandist, there is always a simple solution for every problem. In the case of César Vidal his simple message is that the solution to society's ills is to return to and follow the teachings of the New Testament and to preserve traditional Spanish cultural values by keeping out foreign influence, especially Muslims, a group he perceives to be a particular threat to Spanish society at the time he wrote *Artorius* and other novels. Vidal speaks as a man who fervently believes he is acting in good faith since the 'truths' he preaches are ones that come directly from the New Testament and are sustained by the teachings of the Ten Commandments. As he states in his book *La libertad tiene un precio* the values by which he lives his life are not those invented by men throughout the centuries but by those taught and lived by Jesus himself (Vidal, Jiménez Losantos 2012, loc 2878), and for this, he makes no apologies. This non-apologetic authoritarian stance also comes through in the thoughts and actions of Merlin, Vidal's mouthpiece. For example, in the scene already described in this chapter in which Merlin and Vivian discuss the treatment meted out to Mary Magdalene in the Bible story, Merlin is unable to consider Mary's situation from any another point of view other than that she was a sinner because of her adultery and the Bible states that

adultery is a sin. This non-apologist trait is another salient characteristic of the author of the *roman à thèse* (Suleiman 1983, 240).

An important conclusion that may be drawn from the arguments put forward in this chapter is that César Vidal's novel is patently an ideological narrative that has as one of its major objectives the imposition of a value-laden meaning to his text. As André Lefevere (1992, preface) famously said, 'all rewritings...reflect a certain ideology and a poetics and as such manipulate literature to function in a given society in a given way' and César Vidal's retelling of the story of Arthur, or Artorius, is not an innocent text: it is weighted with Vidal's personal views on society and family, immigration, sexuality and religion and all of these views stem from his right-wing, fundamental Christian beliefs. Throughout the narrative, the reader is manipulated through the performative practice of intertextuality towards the 'right road' of action that has at its basis a fundamentalist reading of the New Testament. An understanding of the political and social context in which the novel was written is essential for its appreciation as a piece of political propaganda, which is what it is, and thought of in this way it bears comparison to the works of the many writers and rewriters of the Arthurian legend who have used the story for exactly the same purpose.

Chapter 8: Gender, Discourse and The Representation of the 'Body' in *Artorius*

Introduction

Chapter 5 of this thesis, which dealt with the representation of the 'body' in *ERDSG*, posited the notion that the 'body' is not a constant and universal reality but is an ideologically structured entity. Within the chapter, the scholarship of a number of contemporary theorists on the 'body' helped to demonstrate that in society persons come to understand themselves and their roles in that society through their culture's discursive practices. Thought of in this way, the 'body' can be seen as a politically inscribed entity, fashioned by a culture's discourse. In *ERDSG* one of the dominant cultural discourses was shown to be the chivalric system and it was observed how by its strict rules of conduct it was able to exert and sustain power on the human body, thus ensuring its containment and control. However, each and every discourse in a society, while setting out its own agenda, is at the same time able to mask the fact that there could be other equally valid agenda representing other 'cultural interests' which could operate in that society (Perkins 1995, 3). An **intertextual** reading of *ERDSG* has offered up such an alternative valid agenda, which, as the chapter has demonstrated, challenges the social and cultural 'truths' handed down by a male-dominated society. The narrative's alternative feminine discourse enabled the female protagonists to rebel, with varying degrees of success, against the laws and restrictions of a medieval patriarchal society. This counter-discourse, in touch with the forces and impulses of the female body, emphasized that the 'body' can be viewed not only as a terrain on which power can be exercised but also as a site where power can be resisted. This is most evident in the jubilant reversal of the balance of power in favour of the Grail Maidens in the second half of the novel. This penultimate chapter will focus on the dominant discourse that shapes the representation of the 'body' in César Vidal's *Artorius*, namely that of Christianity, and especially the teachings of the apostle Saint Paul. The message on how to live a good Christian life through the 'body', contained in the Letters of St Paul, is integral to the way that César Vidal represents both the male and female body in *Artorius* and is reproduced consistently to promote Vidal's evangelical message that life should be lived according to the

values and beliefs that are laid out in the New Testament. In *La libertad tiene un precio*, César Vidal asserts the influence these values have had on his life:

Pues bien, esos valores, los enseñados y vividos por Jesús, no los inventados por los hombres a lo largo de los siglos, son aquellos con los que yo intento conformar y vivir mi vida.²⁸⁸
(Vidal, Jiménez Losantos 2012, Loc. 2878)

For example, in his letter to the Corinthians 6:9-10, Saint Paul writes that the unrighteous (fornicators, idolaters, homosexuals, adulterers, thieves, swindlers, covetous people) will not inherit the kingdom of God.²⁸⁹ At every opportunity in *Artorius* César Vidal conveys this Pauline message of the importance of disciplining the body to suppress its wayward desires in order to avoid what he considers the kinds of unrighteous behaviour as listed above. This is achieved through the words of his narrator Merlin in the prologues of each of the chapters and, as will be observed in this chapter, in the moral stance reflected in Merlin's conduct. As seen in the previous chapter, this literary technique of redundancy conforms to the structure of the ideological novel or *roman à thèse*, as described by Suleiman in her book *Authoritarian Fictions* (1983) and is a potent method of emphasizing a message, as it is a way of using words or expressions 'that explicate, isolate, contrast, emphasize or even dramatize what was already contained in the message' (Wit, Gillette 1999, 16). This chapter also provides an opportunity to observe the workings of the 'amalgam', another redundancy technique closely associated with the *roman à thèse*, whereby the author constructs the novel's characters in such a way that their culturally negative qualities are redundant with qualities that are understandable to a specific ideology or doctrine (Suleiman 1983, 188-193). In *Artorius* this is demonstrated particularly in the representation of Vivian and Ronwen where Vidal/Merlin refers frequently to their craftiness and cunning and the use of their bodies as instruments of sexual temptation in an attempt to persuade the reader to link these negative qualities to their paganism and the fear of the erosion of Christianity. According to

288 Thus, those values, those taught and lived by Jesus, not those invented by men throughout the centuries are those by which I abide and live my life.

289 <https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=1+Corinthians+6:9-10>

Suleiman, '[t]he technique of the amalgam is one of the more transparent devices of propaganda literature' (Suleiman 1983, 190).

1. The Early Christian View of the 'Body'

Before further focusing on the teachings of St Paul and how these are reflected in *Artorius* it is interesting to explore how the development of Christianity altered the accepted ways of thinking, writing and speaking about the 'body' in the discourse of the early Roman Empire. In Chapter 5 it was noted that in the Hellenic world, from around the 5th century BC, cultural discourse presented a conception of the human self as a rational mind/soul that exerted control upon a body whose needs and desires inhibited the mind or soul from attaining perfection. This philosophical contrast between mind and body then came to be represented in Western Christianity as the opposition between spirit and flesh. By the 2nd century AD, fuelled by the spread of Christianity, the image of the mind/soul controlling the body was gradually replaced by a discursive shift by which the 'body' came to be a subject that apprehended itself as a sufferer (Perkins 1995, 7). Under this new Christian narrative, the 'body' was invested with a new significance as bodily suffering began to provide Christians with a community identity and unite them in the belief that to be a Christian was to suffer and die but then be rewarded with the promise of resurrection to eternal life. Thus, self-denial, pain, suffering and death, things that had universally been thought of as bad and contemptible were suddenly seen as valuable (Perkins 1995, 123), as these could now ensure one's passport to heaven. As believers in Christ did not know when their own death would come, the Church, as an institution, was able to insist on creating subjects that would be ready at any time for the call to eternal life (Perkins 1995, 3). This meant that, by means of its rites and a doctrine that permeated all areas of the public life of its members, the Church could regulate and discipline the needs and functions of the body to produce the subjectivity it needed to exist as an institution (Perkins 1995, 121).

1. 2 The Teachings of St Paul of Tarsus

In *La libertad tiene un precio* César Vidal reveals his fondness for the teaching of St Paul and recounts how reading his epistles in the original Greek inspired him and led to his own ‘conversion’:

experimenté mi conversión leyendo el Nuevo Testamento en griego... Entonces, al llegar a la carta de Pablo a los Romanos, de manera muy poco original, todo hay que decirlo, me convertí.²⁹⁰ (Vidal, Jiménez Losantos 2012, Loc. 868)

The writings of St Paul dominate the New Testament. His first letter to the Thessalonian church is thought to be the earliest surviving Christian document and his letters predate the Gospels by at least twenty years. Paul, a Greek-speaking Jew who claimed he had Roman citizenship, had never met Jesus in his lifetime and was executed in Rome around 60 AD (Brown 1990, 44). At first, he was a fierce opponent of Christianity but according to *Acts* 9: 1-9 while on the road to Damascus he had a visionary encounter with the risen Jesus.²⁹¹ Once converted, he then made it his mission to convert the Gentiles or pagans to Christianity, an action that was central in the transformation of Christianity from a Jewish cult into a world religion. Paul travelled through what is now Turkey and Greece, setting up churches (i.e. Christian communities) in Greek-speaking cities such as Thessalonica, Corinth and Ephesus.

The metaphor of the ‘body’ forms the keystone of Paul’s theology. He was instrumental in creating the perception of the body as a sacrosanct entity, referring to it as the ‘temple of the Holy Spirit’. In his epistles, the community of Christian believers are repeatedly referred to as the *Corpus Christi* or ‘the body of Christ’. For example, in I Corinthians 12: 12-28, the faithful are presented as the parts of the body (the eyes, the feet, and the ears) which make up the church, which is Christ himself

²⁹⁰ I experienced my conversion reading the New Testament in Greek... on reaching the Letter of Paul to The Romans, in a not so original way, it must be said, I converted.

²⁹¹ <https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Acts%209:1-9>

and of which he is the head.²⁹² St Paul, in his writings, focuses on the image of the body as a vulnerable entity that lies in the shadow of a mighty force, which is the desire of the flesh. The flesh is presented as a dangerous phenomenon, a symbol of moral corruption that threatens social stability and has to be subdued by a range of disciplines, which include self-control, meditation and religious practice. According to Paul, it is the desire of the flesh that makes the body resist the will of God and it is the Christian's duty to master this threat to maintain the purity of the soul and the mind. The unruly body was particularly associated with the female sex partly because of the biblical image of Woman as the betrayer of Man in the Garden of Eden and partly, because women were (and are still) tied to nature through their sexuality and fertility (Turner 1996, 126). The female's ability to reproduce the species denotes this unbreakable link with nature, which in turn is linked to primal sources such as emotion and irrationality.

Yet, in spite of the dangers of the flesh, Paul's theology emphasized that through the crucifixion, Jesus's ultimate self-sacrifice of dying on the cross, the sins of all mankind were redeemed and that through His resurrection the lowly bodies of his Christian followers would become like his glorious body. Good Christians must, therefore, be prepared to allow their bodies to suffer for their beliefs and promote self-discipline as a means of achieving eternal life. Death should be embraced because, in contrast to the imperfections of life on earth, there was hope of a better life to come. The Pauline message that death holds nothing to fear as it is the beginning of a new life forms a fundamental part of César Vidal's Christian message which he imparts through the words of Merlin in the novel:

*No todo concluye con la muerte; nuestro cuerpo es una envoltura de la vida que lo abandona cuando se produce el fallecimiento; y, acto seguido vuela hacia otro mundo diferente del actual.*²⁹³
(Vidal 2008, 223)

²⁹² <https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=1%20Corinthians+12%3A12-28>

²⁹³ Not everything ends with death; our body is life's covering that leaves when we die and immediately flies away to another world different to our own.

In early Christianity, sexuality came to be regarded as incompatible with religious practice. Saint Paul was instrumental in preaching the value of sexual continence as a requisite of leading a good Christian life on the grounds that celibacy made one free from worldly concerns and better able to concentrate on the fulfilment of God's will (Louth cited in Coakley 1997, 115). In his first letter to the Thessalonians Paul gives the following advice:

This is the will of God, your sanctification: that you abstain from unchastity, that each one of you know how to control his own body in holiness and honour, not in the passion of lust like heathens who do not know God.²⁹⁴ (1 Thessalonians 4:3-5)

Louth (cited in Coakley 1997, 115-6) remarks that to lead a virginal or celibate life was the sign of a good Christian as these corporal states demonstrated an attempt to return to the primal, incorrupt state of the body before original sin. He also suggests that the state of celibacy anticipates the purity of the state of the resurrection, a state that is beyond the distinction of sex and which is hinted at in the words of Jesus when he says to the Sadducees: 'When the dead rise, they will neither marry nor be given in marriage; they will be like the angels in heaven'.²⁹⁵ However, Paul does concede that marriage is preferable to falling into the temptation of fornication,²⁹⁶ which suggests that the Church considered marriage to be one of the important social controls that helped discipline its followers, as it offered yet another line of defence against the wayward fulfilment of desire. In the eyes of the Church lust was a force that had no place in the sexual act: if a man enjoyed his wife sexually then the act was regarded as equivalent to fornication (Turner 1996, 46-8). The institution of marriage and the family existed as a patriarchal and repressive discourse to repress pleasure in the interest of reproduction.

²⁹⁴ <https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=1%20Thessalonians%204:3-5>

²⁹⁵ <https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Mark+12:25>

²⁹⁶ <https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=+1+Corinthians+7&version=NIV>

2. The Representation of the Female 'Body' in *Artorius*

Merlin's interaction with Vivian, the Lady of the Lake, and his descriptions and recollections of the other female protagonists in the story, namely Ronwen, daughter of Hengist, Leonor of Gwent, the first wife of King Arthur, and Merlin's own mother, provide a narrative wherein César Vidal's personal values and opinions strongly shine through. This narrative does not permit a positive reading of the female characters of the novel. Such negativity tends to go against the trend in the portrayal of women in contemporary Arthuriana by other modern authors such as Rosemary Sutcliff (1920-1992) in her book *The Lantern Bearers* (1959), Marion Zimmer Bradley (1930-1999) in *The Mists of Avalon* (1982) and Bernard Cornwell (b. 1944) in his trilogy 'The Warlord Chronicles' (1996, 1997, 1998). In these novels, women occupy a 'more determining role' in the plot line of the narrative which contrasts with the roles that Arthurian women traditionally play in medieval literature, where they are often considered evil and meddlesome and thought to be the real cause for the fall of Camelot (Sanz Mingo 2009, 156). In *Artorius*, with the exception of his mother, Vidal's female protagonists conform to the negative side of the binary division that categorised the representation of women in medieval times, as was discussed in Chapter 5 of this thesis. This division decreed women as either virginal and virtuous or wily and seductive, verging on the modern-day notion of the *femme fatale*.

The few women characters that do appear in *Artorius* are portrayed as dangerous as they work to subvert the social, religious and natural order by the use of their 'bodies' as an exchange to obtain what they desire. For example, after inviting Merlin to dine with her on Avalon, Vivian reveals that she wants to possess Merlin's powers, and in exchange for this she is willing to reward him with any favours she can:

- Seguramente, querrás saber por qué te he traído hasta aquí- comenzó a hablar con un tono diferente Vivian-. Ya te he dicho antes que soy una mujer que busca la sabiduría. Me consta que tú conoces muchas cosas que yo ignoro y que ansío saber. Te

ofrezco que te quedes conmigo. Estoy segura de que no te arrepentirás. Aquí no carecerás de nada.²⁹⁷ (Vidal 2008, 187)

The tone of Vivian's language is seductive and aims to beguile Merlin who is already in the process of becoming infatuated with her. Similarly, as will be described later in the chapter, another female character, the Saxon Ronwen, relies on the powers of her beauty and flattery to seduce the *Regissimus Britanniae* Vortegirn with the result that her bodily charms and pagan ways lead directly to the downfall of Britannia. The case of the briefly sketched character Leonor of Gwent offers a slightly different scenario as she, in what would now be considered a very modern and feminist way, takes control over her own body in exercising her decision not to become a mother and choosing to embark on an extra-marital affair with one of Artorius's knights. Other contemporary historical novelists, such as Bernard Cornwell in his 'Warlord Chronicles', have also chosen to represent Arthur's wife as a woman with ideas more befitting the twenty-first rather than the fifth century (Sanz Mingo 2017, 29). In Cornwell's trilogy, Guinevere is depicted as an astute woman who is said to be more a rival to Arthur than his companion. However, in *Artorius*, the efforts of the female protagonists to use their 'bodies' in order to obtain a desired outcome which would benefit them as women do not succeed: Vivian fails to convince Merlin of her alternative views on life and religion and is abandoned by him; Ronwen's destiny is not elaborated upon in the novel but as an Arthurian literary figure Ronwen's actions gain her the unenviable representation of the devilish woman or *femme fatale* in subsequent rewritings of her story, and Leonor of Gwent is cast aside as an unfit wife and divorced by Arthur. As protagonists, they are firmly trapped by the misogynistic stereotypes that formed part of the thinking about women and their role in society in the Middle Ages and Vidal's representation of them makes these traits more entrenched. Vidal's female characters do not have the possibility of breaking free from the social and cultural restraints of the patriarchal society in which they live as their actions are continually judged by Merlin (and Vidal) in relation to Christian ideology and doctrine.

297 Surely, you must want to know why I have brought you here-Vivian began to speak in a different tone of voice-. I have already told you that I am a woman who is seeking knowledge. I am aware that you know many things that I do not and that I want to know. I invite you to stay with me. I am sure that you will not be sorry. Here you will want for nothing.

3. The Textual Analysis

As stated in the opening paragraph to this chapter, the influence of Pauline Christian values on César Vidal's writing may be found in the rhetoric contained in the prologues, in the comments and conduct manifested by Merlin, and in Vidal's representation of his female protagonists. In his representation of women Vidal coincides with the way that females are traditionally portrayed in medieval Arthurian literature; in other words, as the bearers of numerous negative stereotypes inherited as a result of being the figurative daughters of Eve, the temptress in the Garden of Eden. This negative image, however, does not only occur in medieval Arthurian literature but also persists in much later Arthurian work, for example in the poetry of Alfred, Lord Tennyson (1809-1892) whose writing brought about a renewed interest in Arthurian material in the later 19th century. In *The Idylls of the King* (1859-1885), a series of twelve narrative poems on Arthurian characters, the idyll entitled *Merlin and Vivien* most clearly links Vivien to Eve and the Devil in the form of the serpent, in the Biblical episode, as shown by the following lines:

And lissom Vivien, holding by his heel,
Writhed toward him, slid up his knee and sat,
Behind his ankle twined her hollow feet
Together, curved an arm about his neck,
Clung like a snake... (Tennyson [1885], 2004, 236-40)

Scholars have noted that women who do wield power in Arthurian literature, like Vivien, have rarely been portrayed in positive terms and that their power is usually equated with the supernatural (Fries 2000, 68), or with bewitching beauty, rather than wisdom and intelligence. These seductive powers are sometimes used to captivate the male protagonist, occasionally leading to his downfall. The next section of this chapter will now focus on the individual female characters in *Artorius* and offer a more detailed insight into how the 'body' is represented in the narrative.

3.1 Vivian

The first reference to a female character in *Artorius* is made at the beginning of the novel as it opens with a description of the Isle of Avalon, the land to which the narrator Merlin has brought Artorius to have his wounds tended after the Battle of Camlann. Merlin describes Avalon as a domain like no other place on earth stating that, 'no es Dios el que reina en Avalon'²⁹⁸ (Vidal, 2008, 9). At this stage, Merlin does not reveal the identity of the 'being' that holds sway over the island but hints at an aura of the supernatural that links both the island and its sovereign. Merlin also reveals that the overseer of this island had captured his heart, yet the language he uses to describe this experience is negative and not indicative of a pleasurable experience. To the contrary, a scenario of entrapment is suggested:

Se trata de la única persona que ha logrado apresar mi corazón entre sus dedos de la misma manera que un pescador diestro puede sujetar una trucha escurridiza o que un niño inocente, pero hábil se apodera de la mariposa multicolor.²⁹⁹ (Vidal 2008, 10)

As is revealed later in the narrative, the 'being' of which Merlin speaks is the Lady of the Lake, or Vivian as she is called in *Artorius*. In Arthurian legend, this character is also known as Niniane, Nimue or Nineve, or by several other spellings of these names that are found in the literature. Over the centuries authors have transformed the love story between Merlin and Vivian, taking elements from preceding versions of the story, whilst adding others to blend in with their storyline and reflect their social commentaries. In most versions of the love story Vivian sequesters Merlin from the rest of society. In the French Vulgate, she and Merlin are very much in love and there is no sinister reason behind his enclosure in the beautiful tower. He appears to be there of his own free will and there is no sense of entrapment. However, the Post Vulgate version sees Ninianne throw Merlin into a tomb, which she then covers with a

²⁹⁸ It is not God who reigns in Avalon.

²⁹⁹ She is the only person who managed to capture my heart between her fingers in the same way that a dexterous fisherman restrains a slippery trout or the innocent but skilled child captures the multi-coloured butterfly.

stone, leaving him there for the rest of time. In Malory's version of their relationship, Nenyve imprisons Merlin under a magic rock in such a way that he cannot free himself, and in Tennyson's version Vivien, incarcerates Merlin in a hollow oak in which Merlin has fallen asleep.³⁰⁰ Thus, some form of entrapment is a traditional element that tends to accompany the Merlin/Vivian relationship in Arthurian legend and serves to accentuate the medieval idea that women could only be powerful by possessing supernatural qualities and achieve superiority by the use of treacherous tricks. Vidal incorporates this traditional theme of entrapment in his narrative and this is emphasised by the selection of verbs that are used by Merlin to describe his experience *apresar, sujetar, apoderarse*.³⁰¹ All these verbs intimate that he has been captivated against his will and that this has been achieved in some underhand fashion.

Vivian is not mentioned again until the prologue to Chapter III of the third section of the novel, entitled *Lacus Domina* (Vidal 2008, 141). Merlin had already left the *studium* of his master Blastus to dedicate time to tending to the sick and dying in the villages and towns of Britannia when the news came that the Roman Empire had finally collapsed. Greatly perplexed by this announcement Merlin keeps walking, without any fixed destination, until weariness overcomes him and he stops at a tree, under which he falls asleep. On awakening, he is faced with the most beautiful being he has ever seen who will be revealed, as the chapter progresses, as Vivian.

It is said that the character of the Lady of the Lake developed as an avatar of Morgan Le Fay who made her first appearance in Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Vita Merlini* as the eldest and most beautiful of nine sisters living on the Isle of Avalon (Lacy 1996, 329). In Arthurian legend, Morgan is credited with being able to fly, change her shape and is skilled in the art of medicine. In *Artorius*, Vivian appears to Merlin when he least expects it, emphasising the supernatural nature of her being and the likelihood of her too being a shape-shifter. The ability to fly and to shape-shift was a female quality already present in figures in classical literature, such as Medea, and was a potential implication of a woman's possession of harmful magic. In Arthurian legend too, the

300 <http://d.lib.rochester.edu/camelot/text/pollock-merlin-and-vivien>

301 To capture, to restrain, to take possession of.

ability of women to perform magic was symbolic of women's power over men and could be used as a way to enchant and persuade male characters to follow a different agenda from the general aims of Arthurian society (Larrington 2006, 27). Such enchantresses are not witches but are sexually attractive, strong and intelligent women who employ their magic for their own ends (Larrington 2006, 2). These Arthurian women can use their gift of magic to increase their desirability, inspire madness, and thus render men helpless to their bodily charms. This issue of powerlessness, when faced with the temptations of the flesh, is something that Merlin goes on to describe in great detail.

The prologue to Chapter III of the section *Lacus Domina* begins with the Latin phrase *Quae te dementia cepit?*³⁰² These words are taken from the second of Virgil's *Eclogues* and are spoken by the lovesick shepherd Corydon. As has already been established in Chapter 7 of this thesis, the purpose of the prologue in César Vidal's narrative is to explain, develop and reinforce a point that adds to his propagandistic religious or social message, which is then developed in the ensuing text. Intertextual references to Virgil's works is one of his favoured ways of doing this and in this particular reference the message deals with how the upright man should deal with feelings of sexual infatuation with another person's body. In the Virgilian text, Corydon has realised that his emotional and physical isolation from his male lover Alexis has led to the neglect of his usual tasks. The love-struck shepherd has been consumed by *eros*, a force of romantic energy, which in the pastoral genre often leads to loss of control of the faculties and irrational behaviour, referred to as 'madness' in the Latin quote (Breed 2011). In the prologue, Merlin then goes on to establish an *exemplum* for the reader in which he holds up the situation of Corydon to illustrate that no person is immune to falling under the spell of carnal temptation, but as good Christians, the course of action had to be to rely upon one's strength, good judgement and humility, and stay on the path of righteousness following St Paul's doctrine. Then, even a person's fall into temptation may be converted into a positive experience by the recognition of one's weaknesses and then trying to overcome them. As this chapter progresses, the reader becomes aware that Corydon's situation closely mirrors the predicament of Merlin, who, we learn, becomes infatuated with Vivian and overcome

302 What madness has seized you?

by sexual desire for her. Once again, by using the words and opinions of his mouthpiece Merlin, César Vidal uses the narrative to reinforce his fundamentalist Christian views: in this case, to specifically warn of the dangers of acceding to the temptation of the flesh. Merlin's words make an intertextual connection between the Virgilian *exemplum* and the Pauline teaching on fornication and lust which emphasised that if one wished to be a good Christian and go to heaven the sins of the flesh had to be avoided. Lust was a mortal sin that had no place in the sexual act, which existed, according to the view of the Church, merely to fulfil the duty of reproduction.

Chapters III to VI of this section of the novel are dedicated to the relationship between Merlin and Vivian and in these chapters Merlin offers many rich, physical descriptions of Vivian's captivating beauty. She is alluring in every aspect. He states that the delicate aroma of her body is like nothing he has ever experienced before:

¿Cómo había conseguido aquella fragancia? ¿Qué extraña mixtura había vertido sobre su rostro, su cuello, sobre sus manos?³⁰³ (Vidal 2008, 169)

He also explains that one of her most seductive charms was the magnetic power and the colour of her eyes:

No, lo que provocaba en mí una reacción similar a la del imán eran sus ojos. ¿De qué tonalidad eran? ... En algunos instantes, me parecían de un suave color verde, de un verde opalino y delicado.³⁰⁴ (Vidal 2008, 168)

In Spanish culture, the colour green has traditionally had sexual and amorous connotations. This association may be traced back to Roman civilization where it was a colour linked with several deities of fertility and love, probably because of the

303 How had she managed to achieve such a fragrance? What strange mixture had she poured over her face, her neck, over her hands?

304 No, the thing which caused a reaction within me similar to a magnet was her eyes. What shade were they? Sometimes they seemed to me to be a soft green colour, a delicate and opaline green.

colour's connection with the advent of Spring, warmth, and new life. It was also a favourite hue worn by courtesans. The amorous overtones of green also passed into European medieval culture. Its symbolic value played a part in the fashionable elaboration of courtly love and it became the preferred colour of clothing of anyone in love who wished to manifest the fact. The colour also features strongly in Spanish literature throughout the ages as a symbol of love and desire. For example, in the medieval Spanish play *La Celestina* (1499) by Fernando de Rojas, the lovesick Melibea is said to have 'ojos verdes, rasgados'³⁰⁵ and in the love poem *Porque son, niña, tus ojos*³⁰⁶ by Gustavo Adolfo Bécquer (1836-1870) the beauty of the young girl's green eyes is compared to the beauty of the green-eyed Naiads, who in Greek mythology looked after fountains, wells, streams and other bodies of water.

Both of the above textual quotations hint at the possibility that the woman Merlin has fallen for was not only irresistibly beautiful but also in possession of supernatural qualities and perhaps magical potions. Yet, the many references to Vivian's bodily attributes, the greenness of her eyes, a colour also often linked with enchantresses (Fries 2000, 59), the aroma of her body, all culminate in painting Vivian in a negative light as a seductress. She is portrayed as a woman who uses her body to lead Merlin astray and tempt him from the way a good Christian should conduct his body. An interpretation of this seduction is immortalised in the painting *The Beguiling of Merlin* (1872-1877) by the pre-Raphaelite Edward Burne-Jones. The imagery associated with Tennyson's Vivien links her to the temptress in the Garden of Eden in the same way that Tennyson's poem does. This is also vividly evoked in the recounting of the scene between Merlin and Vivian after the first night they spent together on the island of Avalon. In this episode, Vivian offers Merlin a basket full of juicy red apples for his delectation. Merlin relates:

Tendí la mano, cogí una de las manzanas y le di un mordisco. Su carne era firme y deliciosa y su aroma fresco me recordó las horas que había pasado esa noche al lado de Vivian.

³⁰⁵ green almond-shaped eyes.

³⁰⁶ Because they are your eyes, my girl.

- Y con ellas- añadió sonriente-me tendrás a mí.³⁰⁷ (Vidal 2008, 187)

The association of the apple as a symbol of temptation, sin, and the fall of man cannot be ignored here and recreates the misogynistic connection between women, sinfulness and treachery.

In relating the story of their relationship Merlin does not want to admit that his love for Vivian was purely carnal. As he states: 'Ansío creer que aquel amor nunca fue carnal o, al menos, que no lo fue de manera exclusiva'³⁰⁸ (Vidal 2008, 191). This is because for him the Christian expression of love between a man and a woman is more than this, as he explains in the prologue to Chapter V:

*Estamos sujetos al deseo, al ansia, a la voluptuosidad, pero es más humano no el que se deja domeñar, sobrepasar, arrastrar, sino el que ejerce la sensatez y el dominio propio. Ése es el que verdaderamente hace honor a la impronta que el Creador colocó en él separándolo del resto de las criaturas.*³⁰⁹ (Vidal 2008, 189)

Once again, in this prologue, the message of corporal self-discipline and abstention from activities, which might lead to deviation from the Christian path to eternal salvation, is clearly delineated for the reader as the moral option that should be followed. Merlin emphasises that up until his meeting with Vivian he had remained chaste, following to the letter the apostle's teaching that fornication was one of the gravest sins that one could commit against one's own body (Vidal 2008, 181). He even tries to explain and exonerate his behaviour as being due to Vivian's intoxicating charms: 'Aquella mujer había llegado por la noche y yo había permitido - lo había consentido, no podía engañarme - que sus besos me embriagaran y sus abrazos

307 I reached out my hand, took one of the apples and took a bite. Its flesh was firm and delicious and its fresh smell reminded me of that night at Vivian's side.

-And along with them-she replied with a smile-you will have me.

308 I would like to believe that that love was never carnal, or at least not exclusively.

309 We are subject to desire, to craving, to sensuality but it is more human not to allow oneself to be subjugated, not to be taken advantage of, not to be influenced but to exercise wisdom and self-control. That is the thing that truly honours the stamp placed by the Creator to separate us from other creatures.

ejercieran sobre mi conciencia un efecto completamente narcótico'³¹⁰ (Vidal 2008, 181), and concedes that any bodily pleasure he experienced with her did not leave him at peace with himself: 'Sin embargo, aquel amor no me trajo la dicha ni la paz sino una desazón que aumentó de forma incansable a cada día, a cada hora, a cada instante que pasaba'³¹¹ (Vidal 2008, 191).

Merlin's union with Vivian, by his own admission, could never be absolute, as it did not conform to the teachings of Saint Paul. According to Paul, the body was to be viewed in the following way:

Fue el apóstol de los gentiles el que habló de que nuestro ser está formado por un cuerpo denominado *soma*, por un alma a la que llamó *psyjé* y por un espíritu al que calificó como *pneuma*.³¹² (Vidal 2008, 192)

This quote suggests that for the union of a man and a woman's body to be complete these three elements have to be in unison, but Merlin felt that his union with Vivian could never be complete because, as was commented on in chapter seven, she was a pagan, thus, their spirits could never communicate. The extraordinary power of female sexuality is encapsulated in the character of Vivian and in the way that she uses her body to tempt and manipulate Merlin. As such she represents the female threat to the patriarchal system.

3. 2 Ronwen

Ronwen is another character in *Artorius* who is presented in negative terms due to the allure of her beauty and body. The story of Ronwen, the daughter of the Saxon chief Hengist who, along with his brother Horsa arrived as part of an invasion force

310 That woman had come during the night and I had allowed- I had permitted, I cannot deceive myself - her kisses to intoxicate me and her embraces to exercise a completely narcotic effect on my conscience.

311 However, that love did not bring me happiness or peace, only an uneasiness that grew tirelessly every day, every hour, every moment that passed.

312 It was the apostle of the Gentiles who spoke of our being as comprising of a body called *soma*, of a soul or *psyche*, and the spirit called *pneuma*.

on the shores of *Britannia*, is mentioned in Nennius's *Historia Brittonum* (c.828). According to the tale, Vortigern, the *Regissimus* at the time, offered to make the Saxon brothers rich in exchange for help in fighting the Picts and the Scots, two tribes that frequently launched raids on his kingdom. For this endeavour, Hengist summoned a great number of warriors from his land to fight alongside him and at the same time arranged for his wife and daughter Ronwen to join him. As is the case with Merlin and Vivian, the character of Ronwen has also undergone several changes with each rewriting of her story. In Tolhurst's (2013, 147) study of the medieval redactions of Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia* (c.1136-9), she points out that Ronwen is depicted in a positive light. Geoffrey introduces her as a young woman *cuius pulcritudo nulli secunda uidebatur*³¹³ and does not appear to condemn the girl but lays the blame for her actions and their consequences on her father and husband. However, a subsequent version of the *Historia* known as the First Variant, produced before Geoffrey's death, describes Ronwen as being a *pulchra facie ac uenusto corpore*.³¹⁴ By making several references to her body within the narrative, the redactor of the First Variant makes Ronwen a more seductive and dangerous character compared to Geoffrey's representation of her. The redactor also accentuates the danger that Ronwen's paganism poses to the king as well as his realm: she is a threat to the king's soul and the kingdom's Christian identity. The woman whose body presented an immediate temptation to by extension then becomes a threat to the entire Christian faith (Tolhurst 2013, 147-8).

The next redaction of Geoffrey's work, Wace's Anglo-French translation, the *Roman de Brut* (1155), written in the year that Geoffrey was said to have died, draws both upon Geoffrey's *Historia* and the First Variant versions of the *Historia Regum Britanniae* (Tolhurst 2013, 133). Wace's *Roman de Brut* significantly alters Geoffrey's account and portrays an even more negative picture of Ronwen who he considers to be a foreign queen who will pave a path of disaster by sewing discord and alienating the *Regissimus*, Vortigern, from his own people and rightful heirs. From their first encounter, the pagan Ronwen inflames Vortigern with love and desire, which Wace directly associates with the work of the Devil: 'Tant l'ad Diables timoné, Ki maint

313 whose beauty seemed second to none. (Translation as appears in Tolhurst 2013, 85)

314 beautiful in face and pleasing in body. (Translation as appears in Tolhurst 2013, 147)

home ad a mal turné'³¹⁵ (Wace 6989). Not only does Wace focus on the temptation that Ronwen's body poses to the soul of Vortigern but he also villainizes her as part of a pagan conspiracy, which involved the murder of Vortimer, the son of Vortigern. Vortimer, unlike his father, had disapproved of the arrival of so many heathen Saxons on British shores and after being proclaimed King by the Britons proceeded to fight against them and drove them away from Britain. Vortimer then began to restore Christianity to Britain, which greatly displeased the pagan Ronwen, driving her to commit the evil act:

Par grant haenge e par envie
Ronwen, cume male marastre,
Fist envenimer sun fillastre
Vortimer, que ele haeit.³¹⁶

(Wace 7156-9 cited in Weiss 1999, 180,11.7156-9)

Therefore, it can be seen that Wace stresses much more strongly than Geoffrey of Monmouth how the Devil works through Ronwen, thus encouraging his readers to reject his female temptress.

In *Artorius*, César Vidal also chooses to represent Ronwen in equally negative terms hinting in Merlin's commentary that her unsurpassed beauty belonged more to the realms of the supernatural. Merlin tells of the impression that Ronwen's beauty made upon him when, as a child, he was summoned to the court of Vortegirn, the *Regissimus Britanniae*:

su nariz, sus labios, sus orejas me parecieron de una perfección
extrema, tan extrema que daba la sensación de hallarse situada
en algún punto más allá de lo humano.³¹⁷ (Vidal 2008, 64)

Later in the text Merlin describes the banquet scene in which the seductive Ronwen wins the heart of the *Regissimus*, arousing his sexual desire to the extent that the king

³¹⁵ The Devil enticed him so much, who has turned so many men to evil. (Translated by Judith Weiss 1999, 176).

³¹⁶ Through great hate and envy Ronwen, like a wicked stepmother, had her stepson Vortimer, whom she hated, poisoned.

³¹⁷ to me, her nose, her lips and her ears were of the utmost perfection, such extreme perfection that gave the impression of being from another world that was not human.

asks her father for her hand in marriage and takes her as his wife that very night. Merlin criticizes this unchristian-like behaviour of the *Regissimus*, especially because Ronwen was a pagan. As a Christian, Merlin moralises that the *Regissimus* should have been aware of the Church's teaching that when a man joined a woman in sexual union then their bodies became one and that it was particularly sinful for a Christian to become one body with a pagan. Ronwen's paganism attracts further censure from Merlin as her religion becomes quickly aligned with wickedness. Merlin describes how her influence on Vortegirn allows pagan practice to infiltrate the *Regissimus's* court and further afield. Indeed, her influence was so great that she gained permission from Vortegirn to poison his son Vortimer who had mounted opposition to the hoards of Saxons who continued to pillage Britannia's shores, thus leaving the whole island open to the threat of the spread of paganism (Vidal 2008, 35-37). Like Wace before him, Vidal seems to emphasise how the Devil and Evil may work through the female form, causing the downfall not only of great men but great societies. Through the words of Merlin '[a] fin de cuentas, Ronwen, la esposa del *Regissimus*, era la primera que impulsaba todo aquello'³¹⁸ (Vidal 2008, 41), he squarely blames Ronwen for causing the downfall of Britannia. Interestingly, modern Arthurian literature now tends to be more tolerant of paganism when dealing with the religious tensions believed to have existed in the Arthurian era. Sanz Mingo (2011, 82) has pointed out several examples where the comments of characters show up the Christian religion as being damaging and narrow-minded. For example, Morgan, in the *Mists of Avalon*, opines that Christianity tends to be an exclusive religion not in favour of accommodating other beliefs. However, in *Artorius* there is no instance where paganism is painted in a positive light.

3.3 Leonor de Gwent

In his author's notes, César Vidal states that Artorius was married twice. His first wife is said to be Leonor of Gwent and his second, Guinevere. In the novel, Leonor is portrayed as a complainer, an adulteress and a thorn in the side of her husband. This misogynistic and negative image of women is a common motif in medieval literature and may be found in many texts. For example, the *Roman de la rose* (c.1275), a

³¹⁸ When all was said and done it was Ronwen, the wife of the *Regissimus*, who was the first to trigger all that.

medieval French poem by Jean de Meun, exhibits a number of misogynistic tirades against women as demonstrated here where the poem talks about the pains of marriage:

Qu'il y a vie trop grevainne,
Plene de torment et de painne,
Et de contenz de riotes
Par les orguelz des femes sotes...³¹⁹ (8569-72)

As pointed out by Bloch (1987, 3), the above extract suggests that women are foolish, demanding, argumentative and uncontrollable, all of which are adjectives equally applicable to Leonor in the view of the male characters in *Artorius*. A major criticism levelled against her is that she rejects the Christian doctrine that women's bodies were meant to bear children and to serve their husbands. Such wanton behaviour had earned her condemnation at court as evidenced in the following conversation between Merlin and a merchant who had come to his *studium* to seek admission for his son as a pupil. The merchant describes Leonor thus:

No es una buena mujer... Fíjese, *domine*, que incluso evitaba dar hijos al *imperator*. Dificilmente, se puede ser más perversa y además, entre nosotros, ¿en qué le ayudaba? Porque la principal función de una esposa es ayudar a su marido...³²⁰
(Vidal 2008, 304)

The merchant's words highlight the misogynistic belief prominent in medieval literature that woman, whom God created from man, can therefore only be a secondary and supplemental being in comparison with the male sex, and as such, assumes all that is 'inferior, debased, scandalous and perverse' (Bloch 1987, 10). The merchant goes on to further belittle the worth of Leonor as a woman and a wife by

319 That there is a life too full of torment and strife and arguments and riotousness because of the pride of foolish women. (Translation in Bloch 1987, 3, 11. 8569-72).

320 She was not a good woman... Imagine, *domine*, she even refused to give the *imperator* children. One could hardly be more perverse and besides, between us, how has she helped him? Because a woman's main role is to help her husband. The Latin words *domine* and *imperator* mean 'sir' and 'emperor' successively.

mentioning the unequal contribution that she has made to the marriage between herself and Artorius:

Artorius no ha recibido nada de esa mujer. Bueno, quizá su virginidad en el momento de la boda aunque eso nunca se sabe...¡y además sólo tiene utilidad una vez!³²¹ (Vidal 2008, 304)

Any value that Leonor may have had as a woman is sexualised and reduced to her gift of virginity, which as the merchant points out is of little value as it is only fleeting. Artorius refers to Leonor as a bad wife (Vidal 2008, 310) and states that he wishes to divorce her because he had discovered her adultery with one of his knights. In the Spanish text the choice of the verb *repudiar* to convey the act of separation between Artorius and Leonor imparts a strong sense of rejection on moral grounds, which emphasises the sinfulness of Leonor's actions. It is a verb that is used in legal terminology to signify the desire to terminate a marriage. As McCracken (1994) points out, in her study of the politics of the queen's adulterous body in French Romance, the power of the consort to the king was entirely located in her ability to produce heirs in order to guarantee succession and political and social stability. Thus, Leonor's refusal to fulfil this role and her adulterous act has a detrimental effect on her status as a woman with power and links her sexuality to a transgression of the moral and social law.

In Chapter V of the fifth and final section of *Artorius*, the narrative tells of Artorius's decision to renounce his marriage to Leonor in favour of choosing another wife who is said to be young and beautiful and from a noble Roman family. The name of the chosen woman is not mentioned within the text although in the author's notes her name is revealed as Guinevere. César Vidal does not develop the character of Guinevere in *Artorius* but makes clear that in choosing her as a spouse Artorius has high expectations that she will fulfil the functions of a good Christian wife and bear him offspring who will then carry on his dynasty. Of course, Guinevere's story, which

³²¹ Artorius has received nothing from this woman. Well, perhaps her virginity on her wedding night, although one never knows... and that is only useful once!

first came to light in the Arthurian section of Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia* is not always presented in a positive light in Arthurian tradition. In this *Historia* her adulterous affair with Arthur's nephew Mordred is revealed and in various later rewritings of her story it is even suggested that she might have been a willing accomplice in Mordred's treachery (Lacy 1996, 215). Most accounts of her maintain the story of her infidelity as they do about her barrenness, except for the Welsh tradition, which maintained that she bore Arthur two sons.

The way in which Leonor conducts her 'body' reveals César Vidal's own personal ultra-conservative opinion towards women and his views on the sanctity of the institution of marriage. These views are reflected in the following statement, which he makes in his book *La libertad tiene un precio*:

Yo, sin embargo, siempre he creído en el compromiso, estar sólo con las chicas con las que había un compromiso firme, para toda la vida, explícito, etcétera.³²² (Vidal, Jiménez Losantos 2012, Loc. 1216)

The topic of Arthur and Leonor's divorce therefore allegorically links to Vidal's fears of the changes in women's status and enhanced freedoms that José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero's had introduced in his first term of office.

3. 4 Merlin's Mother

Merlin's mother does not take up a great deal of narrative space within the novel but merits mention as a female protagonist who aligns with the virtuous stereotype of the medieval woman. However, her virtue is due to the fact that her life is lived in a state of self-sacrifice, making amends for the original sin that Eve committed in the Garden of Eden. Merlin's mother, like Mary Magdalene, is destined to live her life as a penitent woman in the eyes of society, as she has been accused of fornication, which was considered a mortal sin by the Medieval Church. In the text, it is revealed that in

³²² However, I have always believed in commitment, to be only with girls with whom I had a strong and definite lifelong commitment, etcetera.

the past she had had to appear in a tribunal before the *Regissimus* where she was not only accused of fornication but also of conceiving her male child without the aid of a human father.

In Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia*, the narrative in which the character of Merlin is developed, Merlin's mother is presented as the offspring of a daughter of a king of Dyfed who had taken up residence in a convent and was visited by a handsome man who came to the nunnery often to embrace and kiss her. After spending a short time with her, this male visitor would become invisible and make love to her and in this way made her pregnant. In Geoffrey's text Merlin's mother categorically states that she had never had relations with a man in the normal way (Thorpe 1966, 167-8). It is Maugantius, one of Vortigern's advisers, who says that the conception must have been the result of impregnation by a diabolic incubus, a suggestion that has persisted in many of the retellings of Merlin's story. However, as Knight (2009, 25) points out, Geoffrey's version of the event provides only vague information, thus leaving it quite possible that Merlin's father was an angel, which would then link the episode to the miracle of the Immaculate Conception of Jesus Christ by the Virgin Mary.

In *Artorius*, Merlin's mother is condemned to a life permanently marked by this 'double sin' of the past. Merlin explains that he was brought up by his mother in the church of St Peter the Apostle which offered shelter for widows and virgins, these being categories of women who did not have any males to support them. He refers to his mother and the other women of the church as the 'buenas hijas de Eva'³²³ (Vidal 2008, 17). Such women, in order to secure aid for themselves and their children, devoted their lives to Christ through their good work in the church, such as cleaning, and looking after the poor who turned up at the church door. In *Artorius*, Merlin's mother is utilised by Vidal to good effect to make moral judgements that further facilitate the spread of Vidal's propagandistic message. Being a woman well versed in the Bible, she helps interpret the meaning of several Bible stories within the narrative for her young son, which then has the advantage of serving as a clear explanation of several moralistic points for Vidal's readership. For example, after relating the story of Moses and the plagues of Egypt to the young Merlin she says:

323 The good daughters of Eve.

- El mal es poderoso, hijo – concluyó mi madre su historia -. Mucho. Tanto que es fácil que uno se sienta asustado por su fuerza. Además usa la mentira para aterrar a los buenos y que éstos no se atrevan a enfrentarse con él. Pero el mal no es más fuerte que el bien. Si uno se mantiene firme en la pelea, si no está dispuesto a rendirse, si confía en Dios como lo hizo el profeta Moisés, al final, siempre tiene lugar la victoria.³²⁴ (Vidal 2008, 46)

Merlin's mother's words clearly set out César Vidal's philosophical basis on life: that life is a struggle between Good and Evil, but if one is righteous and steadfast and trusts in God then Good will always triumph. This is a philosophy that Vidal continually alludes to in *La libertad tiene un precio*. For instance, in a discussion with Jiménez Losantos about religion and the effect it has had on their lives Vidal announces:

Con diecinueve años yo podía asumir que el ser humano tiende al mal, pero seguramente esa asunción era más que nada teórica, mientras que con cincuenta y tres años resulta una certeza indubitable...Con diecinueve años yo podía pensar que determinadas conductas eran correctas, y con cincuenta y tres he llegado a la conclusión de que lo que existe fuera de esas conductas es un peligro terrible.³²⁵ (Vidal, Jiménez Losantos 2012, Loc. 2953)

From this quote, it is evident that for César Vidal there is no middle way or compromise if one wishes to achieve spiritual salvation. The values that men have to embrace are those that are laid down in the Bible and to err from this path of

324 - Evil is powerful, son – my mother finished up her story -. Very much so. So much so that it is easy to feel shocked by its force. It also uses lies to terrify good people so that they will not dare to confront it. But Evil is not stronger than Good. If you stay strong in the fight and are not willing to give in, if you trust in God like the prophet Moses did, then victory will be yours.

325 When I was nineteen I believed that human beings tended to be evil, but this assumption was surely nothing more than a theory, while at fifty-three I am absolutely sure of it... At nineteen I thought that certain ways of behaving were correct and at fifty-three I have come to the conclusion that what exists outside this behaviour is a terrible danger.

righteousness is to court disaster for society, a message that he insists on relaying throughout *Artorius*. As has been discussed in the previous chapter of this thesis the narrator Merlin (hence Vidal) consistently exhibits this Manichean philosophy towards life and this is reinforced and reiterated in the text through the discourse of his mother.

Conclusion

The analysis of *Artorius* has shown that the narrative is an allegory of the social and political events that took place in Spain during the first term of José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero's government and as such is a scathing critique of what César Vidal believes to be the erosion of religious, moral and social values in contemporary Spain. By focussing on the representation of the 'body' in this chapter it has been possible to identify this as another technique by which Vidal can impart his ultra-religious views and impose these on his reader.

In *Artorius*, César Vidal depicts the 'body' solely on a level that is tied ideologically to Christianity. He allows no opportunity for the reader to deconstruct the 'body' through humour or parody to offer an alternative, and more positive reading, as is possible in a reading of *ERDSG*. In *Artorius* the representation of the 'body' mirrors the moral values of César Vidal. In the introduction to this chapter it was suggested that the 'body', although a terrain upon which power and discipline could be exercised, could also be a site where power could be resisted, but in *Artorius*, where feminine resistance does come to the foreground, for example, Vivian's challenge to the Church's teachings on adultery, it is only fleeting and is accompanied by a negative outcome (the breakdown in Merlin and Vivian's relationship). In addition, any attempt to utilise their bodies to subvert the existing social order paints the women in the novel as seductresses and beguilers.

César Vidal has never made a secret of his attempt to use his position as an author and communicator to convey his religious beliefs. In an interview given to an online Christian book distributor, he stated that his mission as a writer was 'to shed light – The Light, in fact – upon a world who walks in darkness' (Christianbook.com 2011).

In saying this Vidal possibly had in mind the fact that in 21st century Spain religion and the Church have ceased to play a major role in public life. This is a phenomenon common to many other western societies, due to increased consumerism and the secularization of society in the postmodern age (Turner cited in Coakley 1997, 34). Whereas religious ideology had served as the cement of Western civilisation for so many centuries and, as this chapter has shown, had succeeded in maintaining social stability by channelling the faithful into socially constructed routine patterns of behaviour which prepared them for the afterlife, this function has now begun to crumble from the mid 20th century onwards. The 21st century 'body' has now become a discourse for pleasure and experimentation and with the growth of mass leisure has emerged as a playful, desiring and hedonistic object. As Turner (cited in Coakley 1997, 35) suggests, '[t]he old patriarchal God of traditional fundamentalism gave way initially to a more "democratic" vision of God as friend and confidant'. For a fundamentalist Christian such as César Vidal whose philosophy on life is based on what he believes are the absolute truths that come from the teachings in the New Testament, the secularized development of Spanish society has heralded an era fraught with uncertainty and instability and the writing of *Artorius*, as has been argued, has been a response to that.

This chapter has evidenced the importance of the 'body' as an ideologically structured entity that is culturally defined as well as being a biological organism. It has also emphasised the significance of the spread of Christianity in defining how people came to understand themselves and their bodies. The concepts of suffering, self-denial and not yielding to temptation became something that bound Christians together and attributes that would guarantee eternal life. Vidal's insistent message on the need for self-denial, the avoidance of bodily temptation, even if this does entail suffering, suggests his rejection of the temporary social order and his belief that the new order in heaven will be a much better experience.

As a final comment, in *Artorius* the narrator Merlin makes a revealing statement as he says farewell to Titius, a student who, after a period of study, was leaving Merlin's *studium*. Titius, an unassuming and normally quiet young man reacts tearfully to the

prospect of leaving his teacher, Merlin, to return home to his parents. The following quote contains the words of advice that are given to the young boy:

En esta vida no hacemos lo que queremos, sino lo que debemos.
Porque el mérito no está en hacer lo que nos agrada sino en
hacer lo que debemos hacer tanto si nos agrada como si no'.³²⁶
(Vidal, 2008, 323)

It is a statement that succinctly encapsulates the philosophy that permeates the narrative of *Artorius*, namely that Man has not been put on this earth to do what he wants but is here to carry out the will of God.

³²⁶ In this life we do not do what we want, but rather what we have to do. Because the merit is not in doing what pleases us but in doing what we have to do, whether it pleases us or not.

Chapter 9: Conclusion

The introduction to this thesis commences with the words of the American scholar Joseph Campbell, who suggests that the reason the great traditions and myths of the world have survived to this day is because their narratives are still relevant in portraying human experience and correspond to situations that occur in our own times. The Arthurian legend has always proven to be a perfect medium for expressing societal anxieties and unease as the flexibility of the tale enables a reading that speaks to the concerns and attitudes of the time. In this thesis, the timelessness and universality of the Arthurian myth shines through. This is reflected in the way that Paloma Díaz-Mas and César Vidal have utilised traditional Arthurian motifs, characters and storylines as a framework to aid the understanding of the social and cultural issues that affected modern-day Spanish society at the time the novels were written. This thesis has also demonstrated that in contemporary Spanish literature the Arthurian legend remains a productive and flexible literary tool that can be appropriated by differing cultural groups to advance particular ideological agendas. To do this, it has identified the **intertextual** references within both texts and shown how the employment of intentional intertextuality by each author has the power to influence and **manipulate** the reader's reception of their texts. In the case of *Artorius* the frequency and nature of the manipulative techniques and language used by César Vidal has led to the conclusion that the novel is a work of **propaganda**. The authors' contrasting use of intertextuality to communicate their concerns and opinions on contemporary cultural, social and political issues has been highlighted and the literary techniques and devices employed to consistently impress their authorial message have been identified and exemplified. In addition, the importance of the texts' paratextual elements, as spaces where the authors have further exerted their influence, has been analysed. The thesis has also investigated the role that intertextuality plays in the representation of gender and the 'body' in each of the novels. At its most fundamental level, the thesis has addressed questions and issues about language, communication and the problem of truth. Both novels, therefore, stand out as exemplars of how the Arthurian legend has constantly been reimagined and reworked in Spain in the 20th and 21st centuries.

1. Intertextuality

An abundant use of intertextuality is something that unites the two novels. Although all texts are inherently intertextual, in that they relate to and draw on other texts, this thesis has demonstrated that when intertextual references are employed intentionally they can be used effectively to disseminate the author's ideas and influence the reader. When readers can identify and interpret resources in the larger intertext this may then help them in the construction of the original text's meaning. As explained in Chapter 3, the recognition of any intertext is subject to and relative to the reader's familiarity with texts besides the primary one, so if the delivery of an ideological message is to be successful it is advantageous to authors to aid the identification of the intertext, which is something that both Paloma Díaz-Mas and César Vidal do.

Judith H. Anderson provides a definition that greatly aids the understanding of the function of the intertext:

The intertext is a convenient term for a relationship or series of relationships with a single text or multiple texts that enrich and reorient the signification and reception of the text in question. The intertext can be imagined on a continuum between deliberate imitation and intentional allusion on the one hand, and on the other, an intertextuality in which the unlimited agency of the signifier operates virtually without regard for context. (Anderson 2008, 1)

Anderson's words have a resonance in this thesis because they suggest that authorial intent and linguistic free play, whilst seemingly opposing binaries, can in practice coexist. Whether the meaning of a text can be determined or not and the question of authors' authority and control over their work has been an important debate in recent literary criticism. In the late 1960s, literary and cultural theorists such as Julia Kristeva, Roland Barthes, Jacques Derrida and Michel Foucault began to question the role and authority of the author and the notion of the text as an autonomous identity

with an inherent meaning. The main points of this argument have been reflected in the Literature Review in Chapter 2. However, this thesis has shown that in *ERDSG* and *Artorius* the authors' creative use of intertextuality, especially manifested in Chapters 4 and 7, manipulates a space in which intended meaning and ideological messages may be found. This has led to the conclusion that an author's intentions are still relevant for the interpretation of works of fiction and should be considered alongside the reader's role in the establishment of meaning.

Parody is a literary technique that is characteristically intertextual. It is often used to create humour that may be critical of a serious work but not intended to seriously offend. In *ERDSG*, playful, ironic, parody at the textual, intertextual, and discursive levels has served as a rhetorical technique to demythologise Arthurian chivalric society and expose its martial, patriarchal and misogynistic foundations. The employment of these different parodic techniques has allowed Paloma Díaz-Mas to convey serious messages about life and create parallels between the values of the medieval chivalric world and those of our modern world, which one must conclude have changed very little. These concerns have been identified as issues about power and honour regarding men and women in an unchanging patriarchal society; the notion of gender as a cultural creation; the theme of Man's inability to be happy with his lot in this world manifested in his need to create metaphorical grails in order to give meaning and purpose to his life, and the undermining of notions of originality and authenticity.

If a wealth of intertextuality is an element that unites *ERDSG* and *Artorius*, then it is the function that said intertextuality plays within the novels that divides them. The parodic form encourages dialogic speech and, as Bakhtin informs, the dialogical word is always in relationship with another word which points to an alternative meaning or perspective. This thesis has highlighted many examples of such speech in *ERDSG* especially where Paloma Díaz-Mas has used it to ridicule the chivalric ideal and to bestow control of language to the female protagonists. The quest for the Holy Grail embarked on by the female knight, 'El Caballero de Morado', brings unrealized possibilities to our attention as, normally, women's stories and experiences have been relegated to insignificance in history and literature. Rewriting the quest for the

Holy Grail from the perspective of a woman, and knowing that women traditionally have been the losers of historical struggles for power, therefore, gives the novel its political feminist edge. Yet, *ERDSG* is not a conventional feminist novel. As a character, 'El Caballero de Morado' does flout the traditional stereotype for women within the chivalresque but in doing so she has to sacrifice her life. Díaz-Mas avoids adopting any fixed, feminist, ideological attitude towards the behaviour of her female characters: she paints both men and women as victims of the chivalric code and it is this grand narrative of chivalry, based on Christian ideals, which she vehemently attacks and demythifies. Dialogic language and intertextuality in *ERDSG* have opened up Díaz-Mas's narrative to a plurality of meanings that create new ideas and allow an alternative feminine reading of her novel. For Díaz-Mas the recognition of the intertextual connections in her work is an experience that she believes can bring a sense of pleasure to her readers, which can help them in the understanding of her narrative and to appreciate possible meanings also beyond the page. This thesis has demonstrated that Díaz-Mas's constant use of intentional intertextuality has been employed to manipulate her readers into a particular, desired understanding of her work.

César Vidal, to the contrary, has used intertextuality in such a way as to leave little room for the production of alternative interpretations of his text. His frequent quotations from and allusions to the works of Virgil and the teachings of the Bible allow no leeway for the reader to interpret his message on multiple levels. There is only one voice that permeates the novel *Artorius*, and that is the voice of Vidal/Merlin, the narrator, and his message of religious and political conservatism. The use of *exempla* or prologues prior to the beginning of each chapter has been identified as an important paratextual space where Vidal has conveyed his values, convictions and beliefs to his reader and it is here that his intention to manipulate the reception of his text is most prominent and persuasive. The manner in which gender and the body are represented within each novel has been selected as of particular interest in demonstrating the contrast in the way Paloma Díaz-Mas has used dialogic language and intertextuality to create an alternative feminine reading of her novel. However, it has been observed that in *Artorius*, César Vidal's literary treatment of the topic has employed intertextuality in a monologic way to close down and confine

interpretation to a biblical understanding of gender and the body, which fits into his fundamentalist religious message.

2. Manipulation

Both novels have raised issues about the question of authenticity and truth in writing about History and Literature. Paloma Díaz-Mas has spoken about her belief that historical knowledge and the possibility of objective truth about the past are problematic. This perspective is characteristic of the scepticism of postmodernism and the challenging of the notion that the world can be rationally comprehended. This scepticism maintains that we can only know the past through language, through words and texts that have already been written before and even more problematic is that these words are subjective, can mean different things in different contexts and therefore cannot be relied upon as the representation of truth. If words cannot be trusted because of their dialogic nature, and all texts are partial and bear the biases of their writers, then any text that has been handed down through history may be questioned as to its authoritativeness and the ideology it contains. It has always been in the interest for dominant ideologies to maintain power and repress revolutionary thought. As discussed in Chapter 4, Western philosophy has always been logocentric, in other words it has always been committed to some ultimate word, presence or essence, truth or reality that will act as the foundation of all our thought, language and experience. It is from such religious, political or mythical texts, from these 'grand narratives' that societies have obtained their cultural values and beliefs. The Arthurian myth has participated in this. The life story of the brave, noble and kindly Arthur became a standard to which knightly heroes of the Middle Ages aspired. As one of the Nine Worthies,³²⁷ Arthur was considered to be one of the most chivalrous men in history, and to embody ideal virtues especially in service to God and country. Throughout the centuries chivalric values have impacted on Western culture as a blueprint as to how men and women should behave and helped to create and foster gender stereotypes. For men, the chivalric code committed them to be brave, loyal,

³²⁷ The Nine Worthies, made up of three Jewish, three pagan and three Christian heroic men symbolized the three distinct chapters in chivalry's development.

honourable and adventurous, while for women it relegated them to a secondary and subservient position in society, away from the world of independence and adventure.

On the other hand, César Vidal has approached the writing of history and the concept of historical truth differently. Using the earliest sources of the Arthurian legend to make his case, he claims to have found the identity of the true Arthur based on rigorous research of reliable historical information. These are claims he makes in his author's notes and on the back sleeve of his novel, but this thesis has demonstrated that Vidal's claims fall short on many counts. One of the major reasons for this is that his use of the medieval sources to construct his biography of the historical Arthur does not appear to acknowledge that the historical documents and chronicles that he utilizes were written in particular cultural, social and political contexts which may have affected or influenced their authors' particular version of facts or events and consequently may have been politically and ideologically motivated. Vidal's narrative, therefore, constitutes a manipulation of the Arthurian story in the sense that it is woven from selected details, based on unreliable historical information, fabrications and unsubstantiated details that the author presents as facts. However, the purpose of this manipulation is intentional, as Vidal has wished to create a version of the medieval narrative that gives him a platform to channel his own political and religious ideas and relate his newly created medieval text to contemporary times.

3. Propaganda

At the time César Vidal wrote *Artorius*, Spain was experiencing many cultural changes evidenced in the array of wide-ranging social reforms that were brought in by Prime Minister José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero's government during his first term of office in 2004. The research undertaken for this thesis has put forward substantial evidence to support the hypothesis, first posited by Sanz Mingo, that the novel is an allegory of the social and political situation in Spain at that time. This novel and innovative focus has proven to be the most interesting and engaging aspect of César Vidal's work. A question that the reader of this thesis might wish to ask is why would César Vidal use the allegorical form to express his political, social and religious concerns about a Spain that he felt was changing rapidly, and for the worse, when he was already

involved in criticizing the government openly and freely by means of the aforementioned media channels? A possible answer to this question may lie in the nature of allegory itself. The allegorical form deals with collective and human issues and has the ability to resonate across time because its themes allow readers to apply them to their situation through a personal analogy. Semantically the word allegory does not mean 'to say something in another way', which is how irony could be defined, but rather relates concepts or events to a set of circumstances that can be understood again, in the light of another reality. This means that it is a very effective way in which an author can influence the thoughts and behaviour of future readers: therefore, for a didactic novel such as *Artorius* it is the perfect form.

The identification of *Artorius* as a didactic and propagandistic novel has been supported by the comparison of its literary structures to that of the *roman à thèse*. The model drawn up by Susan Suleiman in her book *Authoritarian Fictions* (1983) defines the *roman à thèse* as an authoritarian genre in which the role of readers is strongly programmed. Rather than being invited to form their own view and become co-producers of meaning in the text, as happens in the postmodern novel, readers are infantilized and subjected to the ideas and opinions of a higher authority. In *Artorius* the omnipresent higher authority has been identified as Merlin the narrator who, as the mouthpiece of César Vidal, has consistently imposed an authoritarian authorial presence in the text. Vidal, the monological communicator, is only interested in his own goal of transmitting his political and religious ideology, resisting any challenge or interplay from the reader. Merlin's ideas and opinions are constantly repeated in many forms, characteristic of the technique of redundancy, as this gives Vidal the best chance to impart his values to his readership. It is this aspect of control that defines *Artorius* as a propagandistic text and differentiates it from *ERDSG*, which is a manipulative text, but not in the perjorative sense of the word. As the moral of the story is the *raison d'être* of the *roman à thèse* the elimination of ambiguity must be avoided at all costs so that readers may interpret the author's message correctly and act in accordance with the 'truth' that they have learned. In *Artorius* the truth that Vidal wishes to impart is that the grand narrative of Christianity, lived through the teachings of the New Testament, can bring stability and order to people's lives. He believes that there is no need for Man to create his own metaphorical grails because

he already has the answer to finding eternal happiness in the Bible. This strikingly contrasts with the message that underlies the narrative of *ERDSG*, which suggests that it is the unattainability of the metaphorical Grail itself that provides motivation in life. For Vidal, the language of the Bible could not be more transparent or more definitive and it is used in the prologues of *Artorius* to manipulate his reader towards the 'right road' of action that has at its basis the teachings of the New Testament.

4. Authorial influence

This thesis has also established that authorial influence is exerted not only in the narrative itself but also within its paratexts. Following Gérard Genette's approach to literary analysis, the search for textual meaning in the two novels has gone beyond the text itself to include all other aspects to which the texts relate; the title, the subtitle, the prologue, the author's notes, authorial interviews and articles. In the analysis of *Artorius*, biographical information obtained from material contained in interviews and newspaper articles written about César Vidal, combined with the autobiographical profile built up by the author in his book *La libertad tiene un precio*, have been used as relevant intertexts to formulate a meaning to his work. In Chapter 3, the examination of the elements that compose the front cover of *ERDSG*, namely, the cover illustration, the title and the subtitle, has demonstrated that even before starting to read the novel, the visual and verbal textual relations made by these paratexts have a manipulative function, ultimately aimed at having an effect on the reader's construction of the meaning and purpose of the work.

Everyone who writes about the Arthurian legend appears to do so for their own specific reasons, adapting and developing the narrative to suit their own ends and often giving it a new emphasis and purpose. Even the very earliest Arthurian texts were used for debate about contemporary issues, as well as literary ones, and medieval authors were acutely aware of the propagandistic power of the text and its potential to influence, covertly criticize, and manipulate. In many ways, César Vidal uses the Arthurian tale in a fashion that is more closely related to the way in which medieval authors invoked the image of Arthur as an inspiration in times of crisis and as a hope for a return to a better society, but this is a lament that things were always

better in the past. Vidal hopes that the realisation of this will make his readers see the value of tradition and good Christian values and act upon this. Paloma Díaz-Mas, to the contrary, does not imply that things were better in the Middle Ages: in fact, many things, such as inequality for women and the inability to find true happiness in this world remain the same. Yet, her text does allow a positive outlook that looks to the future, rather than the past. The open-endedness of the novel, defined by the escape to the East of the 101 Grail maidens, suggests an opening up of new possibilities for these women as they escape a repressive patriarchal society, but they have all been made pregnant by the rustic 'Caballero de la Verde Oliva' which casts a shadow on their prospects for freedom and independence. Yet, even though the outcome of the rebellious and subversive actions of the female protagonists of the novel may not have been exactly as hoped for, their show of female resistance and defiance made possible by becoming masters of their own female discourse resonates in the novel, even if somewhat fleetingly.

The work presented in this thesis has significantly built on existing analyses of *ERDSG* that mainly deal with the appreciation of the narrative as a feminist work as an example of postmodern historiographic metafiction. This research has focused on the collation and a more comprehensive examination and interpretation of the novel's intertextual relationships with Spanish poetry and legend than in previous studies, and in particular its invocation of well-known Spanish ballads. In doing so, it has identified an additional two ballads, namely *El paipero* and *El romance del Conde Niño*, which appear to have been overlooked in the literature. This detailed analysis of the Spanish ballads, poetry and legend has been a worthwhile study because it demonstrates how Paloma Díaz-Mas has appropriated and naturalised the motif of the quest for the Holy Grail into Spanish culture, making the tale meaningful for a Spanish readership. The ideas expressed in Chapter 3 of the thesis, especially those relating to the impact of the novel's visual intertextuality, make a unique contribution to the appreciation of *ERDSG*. The 1984 edition of the novel, with its front cover illustration of the Sicilian puppet warrior maiden, contrasts markedly with the 1993 edition front cover chosen for the Spanish book club *Círculo de Lectores*, which is adorned with Menchu Lamas's postmodern painting *O Forzudo* (1985). The chapter suggests that the visual effect of the former prepares the potential reader for a

possible feminist reading of the novel, whilst the latter edition, now combined at this later date with an introduction by Ignacio Vidal-Folch, encourages the novel to be read as an appreciation of Díaz-Mas's postmodern literary techniques. The discussion presented in the chapter, therefore, lends weight to this thesis' argument that paratexts offer a space where the author or publisher can manipulate the reception of a novel.

Existing scholarship on *ERDSG* has concentrated on Paloma Díaz-Mas's use of structural parody and irony to make her subversive challenge against patriarchy. This thesis has continued this thread but offered a more focused analysis of the rhetorical techniques used to do this at the site of discourse. These literary mechanisms have been examined in depth, concentrating on the understanding of the way in which irony and humour are produced within the text at the semantic level by means of a communicative strategy between the author (the encoder) and the reader (the decoder) of the ironic utterance. This understanding of the mechanics of the attribution of irony greatly enriches the experience of reading *ERDSG* and constitutes a fresh perspective that expands on existing analyses of the novel. Linda Hutcheon's concept of 'irony's edge' has helped to hone into the precise points within the text where this ironic transaction has intentionally been made and highlights the occasions in which Paloma Díaz-Mas intervenes in the text to express an opinion or criticism or provoke certain emotions in her reader. Hutcheon's theory has also helped to support the idea of the author, the producer of parody, as a controlling agent, capable of either overtly or covertly manoeuvring the reader into the desired reception of the text. Chapter 5's discussion of the female 'body' as a site colonised by discursive practices and its exploration of *ERDSG* as a comedic text, which explores the mechanics of humour at a semantic level and emphasizes the discursive exchange at the heart of joking, offer a fresh perspective to the study of the novel.

As pointed out in the introduction of this thesis César Vidal's *Artorius* appears not to have been the subject of detailed literary analysis. From the seeds of the ideas planted by Sanz Mingo this thesis has built a strong case to support his innovative hypothesis that *Artorius* may be read as an allegory of the political and cultural situation in Spain in 2004-2008 and as a work of propaganda. It has assembled a catalogue of

information regarding the author César Vidal's political and religious views and evidence for his criticism of the former Prime Minister. As successful propaganda relates to the prevailing mood of the times, this research has offered an explanation of the political and social climate in a changing Spain at the time the novel was published, commencing with a detailed collation of the social and political changes brought in by the then Prime Minister José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero. Another aspect of the research has been to promote the argument that *Artorius* is yet another of Vidal's novels that contains a veiled attack on Islamic society. Along with a comparison of the novel's narrative structure with that of the didactic *roman à thèse* or thesis novel, all these elements have been used to make a strong case that *Artorius* can be read as a work of religious and political propaganda designed to instil fear and uncertainty into its readership in the face of these rapid, political and cultural changes and an attempt to influence readers' value systems so that they might identify more closely with Vidal's own. The merits of *Artorius* as a historical novel that seeks to tell the story of the real Arthur based on the medieval documents still extant has been challenged, alleging that César Vidal has based his findings on evidence which contemporary historians have now shown to be unreliable.

As a child, the tales of King Arthur and his knights delighted and sparked my imagination. Little did I know that our paths would cross again much later in my life, not so much through a love of history or legend but of words and language, in particular, the Spanish language. It is hoped that the crafting of this thesis and its attention to the dialogic nature of words and focus on intertextuality has demonstrated the potential of words to reach out beyond the text and offer possibilities for alternative understandings or perceptions of reality. An appreciation of the power of words to influence and manipulate, a fact grasped even by the earliest of Arthurian authors, and a comprehension that all language either explicitly or implicitly expresses some ideological view is an important message and something of which we should all display a critical awareness as we go about our daily lives.

As the Arthurian legend is transformed and adapted by authors it is evident that contemporary texts are changing many of its motifs and characters dramatically to suit contemporary tastes. It is this malleability of the legend that has ensured its

longevity. Since the 1980s, feminist influenced works have comprised a significant sub-genre of Arthurian literature and when feminism and the Arthurian legend intersect there is always the possibility for social commentary (Howey 1999, 23). The ways for the legend to inspire feminist storytelling are endless, as Díaz-Mas has shown. Female characters are no longer limited to romantic roles but seek out their own adventures and take risks. Strong female characters are common in modern Arthurian stories, for example, Morgaine in the *Mists of Avalon* (1993) and Guinevere in Bernard Cornwell's Arthurian trilogy, The Warlord Chronicles, comprising *The Winter King* (1996), *Enemy of God* (1997) and *Excalibur* (1998). But feminist issues are not the only contemporary topics that can be evoked by the Arthurian narrative, as this thesis has shown. Rewriting the legend creates a space for authors to contemplate issues of religion and politics that affect people today and some of the ways they can get their ideological message across, as demonstrated by this thesis, is by the **manipulation** of their texts through intentional **intertextuality** and **propaganda**. The focus of this thesis has been on the contribution of two contemporary Spanish rewritings of the legend as representative of the continued appetite in Spain for Arthurian literature. Evidence for the Iberian passion for Arthuriana throughout the 20th and into the 21st century has been made clear in the number of Arthurian works listed in Chapter 2's literature review. Indeed, in 2017, the *Premio Planeta*, one of Spain's most prestigious literary awards was won by Javier Sierra for his novel *El fuego invisible*,³²⁸ a suspense thriller about the hunt for the Holy Grail. In an article included in the 2015 volume *Arthur of the Iberians: The Arthurian Legends in the Spanish and Portuguese Worlds* Zarandona Fernández revealed that evidence for this continued popularity lies in the great number of translations of contemporary Anglo-American and popular French Arthurian fiction into Spanish and Portuguese. However, as well as these, Zarandona Fernández believes that a great wealth of contemporary native Arthurian literature, rich in content and original in ideas, and written in all the languages of Iberia are still waiting to be discovered and studied, along with a considerable Latin American output which has not yet been officially compiled (Zarandona Fernández 2015, 432-434). A long-awaited bibliography of modern and contemporary Iberian Arthurian literature (roughly from the late 19th to the 21st century) has now been produced by Zarandona Fernández

³²⁸ *The Invisible Fire*.

and this would prove a good starting point to identify material for further research. The research methods of discourse analysis and intertextuality used in this thesis have the potential to be applied to any such newly discovered, yet to be discovered, or simply academically overlooked Arthurian texts written in Spanish.

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